THE GROUNDINGS WITH MY BROTHERS

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Edited by Asha T. Rodney
and Jesse J. Benjamin

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Contents

Editors' Note

Introduction: Re-grounding the Intellectual-Activist Model of Walter Rodney
Carole Boyce Davies

The Groundings With My Brothers

1. Statement of the Jamaican Situation
2. Black Power, a Basic Understanding
3. Black Power – Its Relevance to the West Indies
4. African History and Culture
5. African History in the Service of Black Revolution
6. The Groundings with My Brothers

Commentaries

Living the Groundings – A Personal Context
Patricia Rodney

The Conscious Youth
Robin 'Bongo Jerry' Small

The Groundings with My Brothers at Fifty
David Austin

The Continued Relevance of Walter Rodney's *Groundings*
Verene A. Shepherd

Our Responsibilities to Each Other
Randall Robinson

Notes

Editors' Introduction

The Groundings with My Brothers is important in so many ways. It is perhaps the most direct representation of Walter Rodney's natural voice during the early period of his work. These groundings talks, which became chapters, represent Rodney's voice as a very young professor, post-PhD, engaging with Jamaica in 1968, when he was just twenty-six years old. Now, fifty years since its original publication by Bogle L'Ouverture Press, it remains vital and relevant, addressing key issues of Black consciousness, Black Power, the role of the academic and intellectual, the 'Jamaica situation', African history, colonialism and its legacies, liberation, and transnational engagement of racialized police brutality. It is a compulsory text to be used in community work, undergraduate courses, high schools, unions and popular education.

For several years, the editors have worked with Patricia Rodney and the Walter Rodney Foundation (WRF) Board, as well as its advisory board, members, and friends to secure and consolidate a permanent publishing home for Walter Rodney's primary works. We are now able to call Verso Books the new home of Walter Rodney's works. *The Groundings with My Brothers* is the third Rodney book, after *The Russian Revolution: A View From the Third World* (July 2018), and the new edition of his classic, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (November 2018).

We appreciate the willingness of Verso to maintain this critical work as a stand-alone text, and their embrace of and assistance with our plan to add a second part, with reflective essays and commentaries from leading thinkers whose work intersects with Rodney's and illuminates important

new aspects of it. At some point, we realized that we had already been serving as *de facto* editors, and accepted this role as we worked to complete the project. We made a hard decision, along with Verso, not to include the original introductions – in order to keep the book relatively small, so that it could continue to be accessible, from a cost perspective, to a wide cross-section of readers. We intend to make the prior introductions available on the Verso and/or WRF websites.

We were fortunate to secure an introduction by Carole Boyce Davies and essays from David Austin, Randall Robinson, Patricia Rodney, Verene Shepherd and Robin 'Bongo Jerry' Small.

We chose to order these unique contributions in terms of chronology and scope, starting with personal reflections by Patricia, then memories of the groundings in Jamaica by Bongo Jerry, followed by an essay on the Montreal congress by David. We then conclude with an essay by Verene, with its broad scope, and finally, a meditation on the meaning of a life in service of liberation by Randall.

The introduction by Carole Boyce Davies brilliantly frames the work as a must read book of historical resonance and carries it to a new generation. Carole expounds that Rodney provides us with the ability to make knowledge real, in service of our communities; and more incisively, provides us with the ability to impact our innate understandings of the world.

Recollections by Patricia Rodney, Walter Rodney's wife, provide readers with invaluable personal observations, recollections and context. She reflects on the groundings process, that, though organic to Rodney, led to internal disruptions, and is recognized as a major event in Caribbean history.

Robin 'Bongo Jerry' Small shares a scintillating first-hand account of the groundings – his experience working with Rodney during the tumultuous and impactful nine months he was in Jamaica. His poignant memories provide a unique window into the work and impact of Rodney in the Jamaican context.

David Austin provides an account of critical events not previously available to most readers, about the 1968 Black Writers Congress in Montreal, during which word of Walter Rodney's ban from returning to Jamaica was announced. Important details of the interactions with Stokely Carmichael, Robert 'Bobby' Hill and others provide important details for

scholars, and new insight into the dynamics of social movements that have shaped our history.

Verene Shepherd provides a brilliant theoretical and historical sketch of Rodney's impact and continuing relevance. She situates Rodney as providing the ideological orientation for many people in the Caribbean and Diaspora and for the creation of the public intellectual as scholar-advocate.

Randall Robinson, of Trans-Africa Forum renown, provides a concise meditation on Rodney's praxis in general – an incisive meta-analysis on what it means to tend to one's brothers and sisters, especially the dispossessed.

Several people at Verso need to be specifically acknowledged for sharing in our vision of Rodney's legacy: Andy Hsiao for helping develop and secure our overall plan with Verso; Ben Mabie, our main point of contact, who guided this project to its completion; and Duncan Ranslem and his editorial team for their flexibility and precision.

Special thanks to Vijay Prashad and Robin D. G. Kelley for helping develop the relationship with Verso Books and to Roger van Zwanenberg and Firoze Manji for supporting this work.

Our appreciation to Aajay Murphy for his continued work behind the scenes and to Jesse Benjamin's students in the Walter Rodney Speakers Series course, and his other courses, for their proofing and comments. And to everyone who helped at various stages of this project and who supported the broader vision of the WRF.

Finally, our deep gratitude to our contributors, for their reflective essays and timely revisions.

This is the context of struggle and grounding that helped produce this volume. We are excited to share it with you as we continue the work.

Jesse J. Benjamin and Asha T. Rodney
Atlanta, GA

Introduction

Re-grounding the Intellectual-Activist Model of Walter Rodney

Carole Boyce Davies

There are some classics in the library of black studies that have a narrative of their own, even for those who have never read these texts. One such text is Walter Rodney's *The Groundings with My Brothers*, which has particular historical resonance for several reasons. For one thing its title, *Groundings*, captured the rooted exchange of knowledge between the academy and the community (without privileging the scholarly intellectual over the organic or community intellectual) which was his practice. For what Walter offered was a way of making knowledge serve the liberation of our communities from the oppressive European histories and epistemologies which seek to contain this knowledge, just as they historically contained our bodies. *Groundings*, then, offers that ability to make knowledge real and allow it to serve our communities; to return to base as it were; to re-territorialise our understandings of the world.

My working copy of *Groundings* is an old one, bought years ago at New Beacon Books, London, and is one of the editions published by Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications (1983), with a preface by the now-deceased Jessica Huntley and her partner Eric L. Huntley, who themselves epitomise the link between Caribbean scholarship and activism. But this new edition advances *Groundings* to another readership – another generation and a

larger public – and is therefore usable in a number of teaching contexts in Africana Studies, Caribbean Studies and related fields.

The Groundings with My Brothers is organised into six chapters based on speeches written at a time when a Black Power movement was active across the world, but particularly in the United States and the Caribbean. Chapter 1, 'Statement of the Jamaican Situation', addresses the condition of African-descended peoples in Jamaica. At the time of his writing, Walter felt that a hundred years after emancipation, people were still blighted and oppressed, but also this time by local elites or Caribbean neo-colonials who he calls 'representatives of metropolitan-imperialist interests' (p. 3). Here he documents the still-continuing police brutality, unemployment and the stagnation in the rural areas where people were still eking out a living without the benefit of basic necessities. He stresses that this was still occurring over a hundred years after emancipation in 1938, a date he indicates more than once in order to underscore what has failed to transpire in the intervening years.

Defining Global Blackness and Black Power

Rodney's *Groundings* is significant for documenting and historicising the meanings of global blackness and the internationalisation of a discourse of Black Power in the context of African, Caribbean and US internal decolonisation struggles – also called Black Power movements. Two Black Power chapters are included: Chapter 2, 'Black Power, a Basic Understanding', and Chapter 3, 'Black Power – Its Relevance to the West Indies', and are important complementary readings for those wanting to understand the practice and dimensions of Caribbean Black Power movements. While conceptually Black Power is often located only or primarily in the United States, Rodney's *Groundings* documents the impetus for this Caribbean political movement. While there was not a formal practice of Jim Crow segregation and racism, there were versions in the Caribbean, which I identify in *Caribbean Spaces*.[1] And there were instances of defacto segregation: A country club in St. Clair, Port of Spain, which remained whites-only for years and denied entry to a visiting African American staying at the Hilton Hotel who wanted to play tennis, is one example cited by activists there like Khafra Kambon, who indicated that

this was one of the generative issues for Black Power activism in the Trinidad context.[2] In fact, residential patterns in some communities linked class to race, and even Carnival bands in Trinidad maintained, in this period, a naturalised racial hierarchy which accorded participatory privileges to people on a colour scale. Beauty queens were white or 'near white' up until 1978, when Janelle Penny Commissiong won the Miss Universe competition; banks hired only people of a certain lighter colour tone. So, at the level of public practice, a European aesthetic which accorded privilege based on a certain constructed whiteness prevailed. Rodney's 'Black Power, a Basic Understanding' analyses this practice of structural racism in the Caribbean, but it also indicates how this operates globally. For him it is the conglomeration of white power which under racism excludes certain people or advances others based on race. He offers, then, an expansive definition of blackness in order to make his point:

> The black people of whom I speak, therefore, are non-whites – the hundreds of millions of people whose homelands are in Asia and Africa, with another few million in the Americas. A further subdivision can be made with reference to all people of African descent whose position is clearly more acute than that of most non-white groups. (pp. 9–10)

As a historian, Rodney was able to use his research on the global black condition to elucidate the nature of racialised relationships using examples from places as far as Australia. He offers an analysis, then, of what he defines as the 'white power network' which, imperialist in nature, subordinates a range of peoples around the world, largely through violence. In this context, he includes the history of Caribbeans who struggled in the US against this white power network and, like Marcus Garvey, created political movements to redress this power imbalance, or, like Stokely Carmichael, were central to the definition and articulation of a challenging, oppositional Black Power context. Thus Rodney's closing definition: 'The interests of the blacks must be taken into account out of respect for their power – power than can be used destructively if it is not allowed to express itself constructively. This is what Black Power means in the particular conditions of the USA.' (p. 18)

His particular delineation of the US scenario sets the tone for 'Black Power – Its Relevance to the West Indies.' In this chapter he identifies the historical context for black subordination in the Caribbean beginning with enslavement, specifying that the 'West Indies have always been a part of

white capitalist society'. Racism was built into the slavery project and linked economically, as Caribbean scholars such as C. L. R. James and Eric Williams have indicated. This is an important line which counters uninformed claims, based on the absence of visible segregation markers, that racism did not exist in the Caribbean. His assertion instead: 'The West Indies and the American South share the dubious distinction of being the breeding ground for world racialism.' (p. 21)

Relevantly in the context of current Caribbean reparations debates, he indicates that even with formal emancipation, there was European financial reparation and a continuance via apprenticeship which secured free labor for a number of years in order to maintain local whites in power:[3] 'They therefore decided to give the planters £20 million compensation.' (p. 21) In keeping with his own definition of global blackness, he includes the nature of Indian indentured labour in his analysis. For Rodney, Black Power in the West Indies pertains primarily to people who are recognisably African or Indian and has to do with anti-capitalism, political assertion, and cultural reconstruction. Walter Rodney's vision for the Caribbean was a society in which the middle class and intelligentsia served the general population, overcame cultural and economic imperialism, and were able to assert themselves as black people aesthetically, politically, socially and economically.

Thanks to his training in African history, Rodney provided for the Caribbean community concrete information about Africa that was not embedded in prejudice and negativity. His *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) is now a black studies classic. But before that, his two chapters in *Groundings* provided essential information which educated my generation of students. Chapter 4, 'African History and Culture', outlines essential information now taken for granted and supported by archaeological evidence: Africa is the home of mankind. He documents Nile valley civilisations; the various African kingdoms such as Axum and the Niger River West African kingdoms of Mali, Songhai, Ghana, and Kanem; but also Benin and Oyo; and the Central African and Southern African kingdoms as well. These are now fundamental understandings in a range of studies, documentaries and educational contexts. But in 1969, when *Groundings* was written, this would have been among the few early articulations in a Caribbean context. For Rodney, this knowledge was essential to black people's well-being, to give them an understanding of

past achievements and the present-day need for consciousness. His discussion about how human beings became who they are, as it transpired in Africa, was central to rejecting stereotypical epidermal racism and providing black people in the Caribbean with basic information to refute the larger epistemological claims which only re-enforced European superiority. Clearly, his detail about the Ethiopian church and Amharic culture would be also a central affirmation of Rastafari teachings in Jamaica, particularly in the celebration of the contributions of Ethiopia to world history.

Re-grounding Black Studies

As Rodney's work pertains to black studies then, *The Groundings with My Brothers* provides useful and concise information for students who have perpetual questions about African civilisations – about why enslavement came to be normalised in the history of black people's experience. Chapter 5, 'African History in the Service of Black Revolution', demonstrates his intellectual/activist orientation: the application of knowledge in the service of black peoples. Central here was his recommendation for the teaching of African history in the public schools, which is still an incomplete decolonisation issue. But beyond the public schools imperative, the universities remained a cause for concern. The study of African culture and history, dominated for a long time in African studies' institutional contexts by European scholars, he felt tended to focus too much on kingdoms and nations and less on those outside those major states, therefore overlooking the majority of African people. Though at times idealised, basic African-generated social practices and courtesies for the treatment of people in communities were worthy, he thought, of consideration and evaluation as to their continued usefulness in the Caribbean. Above all, he imagined all the teachings of African history and contemporaneous discussions of global socioeconomic relations, as having a revolutionary function in the Western Hemisphere. His was not the logic of romantic return, but of global implication and application. He saw for African diasporans an advanced role: 'Applied to New World blacks, this means in effect that the history nearest to revolutionary action will be the history of Africans in their new American environments.' (p. 62)

The entry of Africana studies at the institutional level was meant to address the issue of representation at the level of thinking and to at least provide a basis for challenging the overwhelming Eurocentrisation of knowledge and the parallel creation of informed students, faculty and administrators – and hopefully of community. Rodney also had an advanced position here, and besides his Dar es Salaam appointment, he had had institutional connections in places like Cornell University's Africana Studies and Research Center. Basically, racism's institutional superstructure of the Euro-American university still means that those who work in Africana studies operate in a field organised to counter a massive hegemonic Eurocentric knowledge edifice. While there have been numerous gains, a primary manifestation of institutional racism is a willful ignorance or avoidance which often dominates these institutions. This means that administrators and colleagues from other departments are often unable, uninformed, unwilling or ill-equipped to represent the interests of these units in ways that benefit the advancement of knowledge. In the rest of the university, there is often only one or two faculty members in major departments, often none in other fields and the rest of the university remains untouched. Students can go through the university and acquire a degree without taking one course that challenges Eurocentric thinking. And more scandalously, colleagues in an Africana studies department can espouse conservative, anti-black positions without fear of recrimination.

One of the best anatomisations of this situation again comes from Sylvia Wynter's 'On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Reimprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of *Desêtre*: Black Studies Toward the Human Project' (2005).[4] She argues that once black studies entered the very order of knowledge it had contested, something different happened. This *something different* was indeed an attempt to operate by the standards of the existing academy: to get people tenured, promoted, to acquire the prizes of the academy such as named chairs (often with names that are highly suspect). Rodney refers, for example, to wealthy capitalists making money from exploiting people in locations outside of the United States, able to fund chairs and buildings with their ill-gotten gains. And above all, many Africana studies departments buy into the same epistemological frameworks (e.g., the disciplines), value certain kinds of work, certain kinds of publications and so on. Wynter recalls some of those aesthetic and political movements which wanted a

‘whole new system of ideas’. Instead, we never arrived at the ‘new territory’, and remaining without the connection from the ‘map’ to this new place. Instead of fully arriving at that territory or place where we could claim to rewrite the script of anti-blackness, we ended up being re-territorialised under Eurocentric whiteness and its assumption of the control of knowledge.

So, as we operate today in the academy, it is important to recall Walter Rodney’s cautionary assertion:

> Black people are here in these institutions as part of the development of black struggle, but only as a concession designed to incorporate us within the structure. [Besides the institution, he says] I am thinking also of the books, the references, the theoretical assumptions, and the entire ideological underpinnings of what we have to learn in every single discipline.[5]

In many ways then, black studies / Africana studies is caught in a paradox: either be located in separate enclaves which can eventually be incorporated or eliminated, or remain at the mercy of an institutional structure which has not really changed. But in my view, there is another option: one provided by radical intellectuals consistently and which Edward Said had summed up well, namely, to always provide a counter-discourse in times when institutions want to create a certain normalisation of oppression. Walter saw an even more advanced role for the scholar-activist: as an academic or intellectual who has to be able to go anywhere and to ‘reason’ or ‘ground’ (as the Rastafari community describes this process of engagement) with community and ‘within his own discipline, has to attack those distortions which white imperialism, white cultural imperialism has produced in all branches of scholarship’ (p. 66).

Grounding and Gendering the Decolonial

Black studies / Africana studies was created in the same time frame as the various decolonisation political movements (both in and outside of the academy) to correct erasures of African presences and ongoing distortions. But thereby arose the issues of incorporation and the paradox of current location. New questions need to emerge, then, that can be brought forward for subsequent deliberation: How to ensure that all students are exposed to a range of knowledges as they make their way through the institution? How

to restructure and move out of that order of knowledge in which a series of other human beings and the work they have produced, their epistemologies and ontological systems, remain outside of the frames of importance in the larger institutional contexts?

So, what about the 'Groundings with My Sisters?' In his final chapter, 'The Groundings with my Brothers', Walter is definite about talking to and with black men, his 'brothers.' While at times, he uses the generic 'man' for humankind, in terms of the time frame when this work was produced, he was deliberately engaging black men in the diaspora and suggesting the need for black men to 'ground' with each other. He is definite when he is referring to black people in general as opposed to 'the black man' and in that wording (black people) that there exists the possibilities for extension.

In 'The Groundings with My Sisters', Keisha-Khan Perry offers a related vision which speaks to the gaps which left 'sisters' out of being named fully in radical transformation.[6] For Perry, the fact that 'Black women have the poorest quality of life and the worst chances of survival, according to the human development indexes for Latin American nations, such as Brazil' allows us to address how activist work is linked to the actual conditions of black women's lives. In this essay, she is deliberate about the diasporic dimensions of black women's experiences, but her work benefits from the four decades of black feminist scholarship produced since Walter Rodney *Groundings in* 1969:

> [This is a] brief reflection on the diasporic dimension of black women's politics, specifically how black women in Latin America understand their experiences, identities, and social activism in relationship to other black women throughout the Americas. What interests me, in addition to the knowledge production and political organizing among black feminists in Latin America, are the various attempts at forming a transnational community of African descendant peoples in the anti-sexism and anti-racism struggle.

Perry is deliberate about citing and using Rodney's 'groundings' as a framework for doing activist intellectual work that engages and reaches black communities. And she is definite about the transnational definitions of this project. In her words, 'the title "Groundings with My Sisters" expresses both my recognition of the interrelated complex experiences of black women globally and how this political positioning informs feminist and diasporic solidarity', and therefore 'feminist groundings'. Her aim, then, is to expand the reach of the Rodney project and to put it in conversation with Caribbean black left women like Claudia Jones who were

activists for women, the working poor and black people, and to use the *Groundings* model as both an activist and intellectual framework for transformational politics

Here it is important to highlight another missing connecting point in decolonial discourses and one which relocates Walter Rodney in current decolonial thinking. In the mid 1990s, sociology and philosophy students at Binghamton University (where Walter had also taught) created a Coloniality Working Group. They organised a series of conferences, among them a Walter Rodney conference to ground or advance the analysis of continued colonial operations beyond Wallersteinian world systems theory. In that process they deliberately engaged a visiting scholar, Aníbal Quijano, who was then theorising his 'coloniality of power' which has since become a staple in decolonial theory. Central to this Coloniality Working Group was the point that what is often erased or obscured is that the US and Europe continue to have existing colonies; and that indigenous people and US African Americans functioned as internally colonised. Thus the students in particular, many of them African American, Latino, or white left Jewish, wanted to push Quijano to consider in his work not only these internal colonies but also the subordinated black communities in Latin America. Re-grounding an engagement with Walter Rodney in the context of decolonial discourses provides a direct link with the Coloniality Working Group at Binghamton, where Quijano revised and refined his initial assertions when confronted by black and Latino urban-based students who wanted to ensure that racism was fully accounted for in this 'coloniality of power'. For significantly, Walter Rodney was central to their debates.

Conclusion

In 'Caribbean Left: Diasporic Circulation', I defined the Caribbean Left as a range of intellectual activists through time, who engage a politics of progressive change from a variety of intersecting political positions. An understanding of the intellectual contribution of Walter Rodney is central to understanding the nature of the Caribbean/black radical tradition. What unites them, I argue, is a rejection of conventional oppressive conditions, and a critique of forms of colonialism, capitalism and imperialism under which the Caribbean laboured, and of the ideas and practices which support

newer versions of these oppressions. What also unites them is a deferral of some progressive realisation at the level of practice, from which future Caribbean left activism can learn.

In other words, since the Caribbean is the site of the first major black revolutions against oppression, as typified by the Haitian Revolution, then there exists an unfulfilled or deferred promise, still articulated in the music, or art, in the popular practices and in the literature and political thought as well. Traces of this resistance, it is my view, create a left tradition with many nodal points, one that refuses to acquiesce to domination even in the face of imperialism and neo-colonial state practices.

The renewed work on decolonisation means that the work of Walter Rodney regains significance and is absolutely necessary reading in the body of literature, along with texts such Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), which have regained new readerships in decolonial theory. For those seeking actual activist uses of scholarship, the 'groundings' model provides an important technical approach – the deliberate articulating of a model of engaged scholarship along with the content of the text itself; the transferral of that knowledge to myriad communities inside and outside of the academy. Given the recent return to open articulations of racism and imperialism, the need for forms of 're-grounding' remain ever present. Walter Rodney provided a still-useful activist-intellectual model.

The Groundings With My Brothers

1

Statement of the Jamaican Situation

In 1938, exactly one hundred years after the supposed Emancipation of the Black Man in Jamaica, the masses once again were driven into action to achieve some form of genuine liberation under the new conditions of oppression. The beneficiaries of that struggle were a narrow, middle-class sector whose composition was primarily brown, augmented by significant elements of white and other groups, such as Syrians, Jews and Chinese. Of late, that local ruling elite has incorporated a number of blacks in positions of prominence. However, irrespective of its racial or colour composition, this power-group is merely acting as representatives of metropolitan-imperialist interests. Historically white and racist-oriented, these interests continue to stop attempts at creative social expression on the part of the black oppressed masses.

It was only natural that imperialism and its local lackeys should have intensified the oppression of our black brothers. But, paradoxical as it may appear, they have been forced to create as a psychological prop to their system of domination the myth of a harmonious, multiracial national society – 'Out of Many, One People', as the National Motto pretends. In this way they are hoping that the black masses will never organise independently in their own interests. Today that system of domination and its justificatory myth are faced with serious challenges and reverses. For a new phase is beginning in the epochal march forward of the Black Humanity of Jamaica.

The break-up of the myth of a harmonious, multiracial society has been rapid and has assumed numerous forms. Firstly, the regime has been forced into carrying out a crude manipulation of the symbols of national black pride. Marcus Garvey and Paul Bogle were enshrined as ‘National Heroes’, when the methods and achievements of these Black Liberators point the way ever more clearly towards Black Resistance today. Their example violently contradicts the hypocritical claim of the state regime to be representative in any way of the Black Masses.

The most profound dilemma of all faced by a regime of alien class elements is that posed by the existence of the numerically powerful Rastafari Brethren, who have completely and inexorably broken with Jamaican society and its values, and who have chosen a faith and a culture based on Ethiopian Orthodoxy. At no time was this dilemma better demonstrated than when the local political bosses were forced into accepting a visit by His Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie, and then literally had to stand back while the population thrust forward enthusiastically to pay homage to the Ethiopian Monarch.

More recently, and at a time when the Black Liberation struggle taking place against white racist American society is fiercest, these same political bandits felt sufficiently threatened by the power of the example of struggle to carry through the banning of Brothers Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown and James Forman. Even more damning has been their prohibition of the liberation literature of Carmichael, Malcolm X and Elijah Mohammad, at a time when the world is celebrating International Human Rights Year piously sponsored by the Jamaican Government.

The local lackeys of imperialism have long had to admit the existence of tremendous social injustice – the gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’ as they put it – but they asked the nation to live with the illusion that things were bound to improve. Now the ‘have nots’, who are the mass of the black people, know that things have been getting worse. The unemployed, numbering some 30 per cent of the potential work force, are understandably desperate and the whole repressive machinery of the State has been brought to bear on them.

The administration of the law has become more vicious and partisan. The number of charges imposed on black people for the possession of ganja (marijuana) are astronomical, and the government has decreed that the minimum sentence on conviction must be eighteen months. A charge of

‘suspicion’ has now been entered into the law books, and to be black and poor is to invite this charge in much the same way as the vagrancy laws operated in the period immediately after Emancipation. The quality of justice dispensed by the legal system still depends on skin colour.

Since ‘Independence’, the Black police force of Jamaica have demonstrated that they can be as savage in their approach to black brothers as the white police of New York, for ultimately they serve the same masters. The Prime Minister has not concealed his determination that the police should be used to maintain the present system of social oppression, and he has given them full authority to utilise whatever brutal methods they think necessary to carry out this mandate. Shortly after taking office last year, Prime Minister Shearer told the police, ‘I make no bones about it gentlemen. I want all Jamaica to get the message that the police force under this Government is not reciting Beatitudes to anybody.’ He later added that the police, whenever confronted with ‘criminals’, should not stop to find out what distance was between themselves and the criminals before ‘setting them alight’. In eight months between August 1967 and April 1968, there were at least thirty-one people who were set alight by police guns, sixteen of them dying on the spot. Other incidents of police brutality are too numerous to mention. Yet one of the most significant strikes in recent times was that carried out by the Jamaica police force, demanding higher wages. That strike was not so much a part of the movement of the black working class, but a part of the breakdown of the system of oppression, for the local political lackeys have shown their incompetence in every direction.

The stagnation in the rural areas has reached a stage of crisis. Marginal sugar estates continue to go out of production, leaving hundreds of workers jobless, and prospects for the banana industry are just as bleak. Apart from their inability to raise the living standards of the black masses, they have failed to make provision for increased water consumption and for drought, they have failed to modernise telephone communications, and they have failed to make allowance for the increased need for electrical power. Consequently, in recent months, the ramshackle nature of the neo-colonial structure has been cruelly exposed, and it was the very middle class who have benefitted from ‘1938’ who recently complained most bitterly when they suffered simultaneously from water rationing, extensive electricity power cuts, a limping telephone service, and no police protection for their property.

What matters above all else on the contemporary Jamaican scene is the action of the black masses in their various capacities. Their activities are in part responsible for the atmosphere of decay which surrounds the present administration, and at the same time they provide an indication of the shape of things to come. The *racial* question is out in the open, in spite of all the efforts to maintain the taboos surrounding it. The Rastafari brethren have been joined on this question by large numbers of other black people – many of them influenced by the struggle and example of black brothers in the USA – while culturally, there is a deepening interest in things African. Of the greatest significance are the effects at self-expression among black people – pamphlets, newssheets, and the like. These independent efforts are essential because of the complete control which imperialism and its local puppets maintain over the various established news media.

Meanwhile, the two reactionary trade unions, which are the most important social bases of the two reactionary political parties, are also facing the challenge of the workers. Not only has there been a wave of strikes without the complicity of the unions, but there is emerging an independent worker movement concerned with the unity of workers in their place of work or within a given industry. The large unemployed sector lacks organisational forms, but there is a widespread reappraisal taking place among unemployed black youths, who have recognised the farcical nature of the present two-party operation, and the self-defeating role which they themselves played so recently in 1967, when they gunned each other down on the orders of the political bandits of the two parties. Whether or not black youths have participated in violence on behalf of the oppressors, they have all suffered from police brutality, and they have seen recently the middle-class members of the ‘gun clubs’ coming forward to volunteer their services in suppressing the people while the police were on strike. Throughout the country, black youths are becoming aware of the possibilities of unleashing armed struggle in their own interests. For those who have eyes to see, there is already evidence of the beginnings of resistance to the violence of our oppressors.

2

Black Power, a Basic Understanding

Black Power is a doctrine about black people, for black people, preached by black people. I'm putting it to my black brothers and sisters that the colour of our skins is the most fundamental thing about us. I could have chosen to talk about people of the same island, or the same religion, or the same class – but instead I have chosen skin colour as essentially the most binding factor in our world. In so doing, I am not saying that is the way things ought to be. I am simply recognising the real world – that is the way things are. Under different circumstances, it would have been nice to be colour-blind, to choose my friends solely because their social interests coincided with mine – but no conscious black man can allow himself such luxuries in the contemporary world.

Let me emphasise that the situation is not of our making. To begin with, the white world defines who is white and who is black. In the USA, if one is not white, then one is black; in Britain, if one is not white then one is coloured; in South Africa, one can be white, coloured or black depending upon how white people classify you. There was a South African boxer who was white all his life, until the other whites decided that he was really coloured. Even the fact of whether you are black or not is to be decided by white people – by white power. If a Jamaican black man tried to get a room from a landlady in London who said, 'No coloureds', it would not impress her if he said he was West Indian, quite apart from the fact that she would already have closed the door in his black face. When a Pakistani goes to the

Midlands, he is as coloured as a Nigerian. The Indonesian is the same as a Surinamer in Holland; the Chinese and New Guineans have as little chance of becoming residents and citizens in Australia as do you and I. The definition which is most widely used the world over is that once you are not obviously white, then you are black and are excluded from power – power is kept pure milky white.

The black people of whom I speak, therefore, are non-whites – the hundreds of millions of people whose homelands are in Asia and Africa, with another few millions in the Americas. A further subdivision can be made with reference to all people of African descent, whose position is clearly more acute than that of most nonwhite groups. It must be noted that once a person is said to be black by the white world, then that is usually the most important thing about him; fat or thin, intelligent or stupid, criminal or sportsman – these things pale into insignificance. Actually I've found out that a lot of whites literally cannot tell one black from another. Partly this may be due to the fact that they do not personally know many black people, but it reflects a psychological tendency to deny our individuality by refusing to consider us as individual human beings.

Having said a few things about black and white, I will try to point out the power relations between them. By the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, the capitalist division of the world was complete. It was a division which made capitalists dominant over workers and white people dominant over black. At that point, everywhere in the world white people held power in all its aspects – political, economic, military and even cultural. In Europe, the whites held power – this goes without saying. In the Americas the whites had committed mass murder as far as many 'Red Indian' tribes were concerned, and they herded the rest into reservations like animals or forced them into the disadvantageous positions, geographically and economically, in Central and South America. In Australia and New Zealand, a similar thing had occurred on a much-smaller scale. In Africa, European power reigned supreme, except in a few isolated spots like Ethiopia; and where whites were actually settled, the Africans were reduced to the status of second-class citizens in their own countries. All this was following upon a historical experience of 400 years of slavery, which had transferred millions of Africans to work and die in the New World. In Asia, Europe's power was felt everywhere, except in Japan and areas controlled by Japan. The essence of white power is that it is exercised over black

peoples – whether or not they are minority or majority, whether it was a country belonging originally to whites or to blacks. It is exercised in such a way that black people have no share in that power and are, therefore, denied any say in their own destinies.

Since 1911, white power has been slowly reduced. The Russian Revolution put an end to Russian imperialism in the Far East, and the Chinese Revolution, by 1949, had emancipated the world's largest single ethnic group from the white power complex. The rest of Asia, Africa and Latin America (with minor exceptions such as North Korea, North Vietnam and Cuba) have remained within the white power network to this day. We live in the section of the world under white domination – the imperialist world. The Russians are white and have power, but they are not a colonial power oppressing black peoples. The white power which is our enemy is that which is exercised over black peoples, irrespective of which group is in the majority and irrespective of whether the particular country belonged originally to whites or blacks.

We need to look very carefully at the nature of the relationships between colour and power in the imperialist world. There are two basic sections in the imperialist world – one that is dominated and one that is dominant. Every country in the dominant metropolitan area has a large majority of whites – USA, Britain, France, etc. Every country in the dominated colonial areas has an overwhelming majority of nonwhites, as in most of Asia, Africa and the West Indies. Power, therefore, resides in the white countries and is exercised over blacks. There is the mistaken belief that black people achieved power with independence (e.g., Malaya, Jamaica, Kenya), but a black man ruling a dependent state within the imperialist system has no power. He is simply an agent of the whites in the metropolis, with an army and a police force designed to maintain the imperialist way of things in that particular colonial area.

When Britain announced recently that it was withdrawing troops from East of Suez, the American secretary of state remarked that something would have to be done to fill the 'power vacuum'. This involved Saudi Arabia, India, Pakistan, Ceylon and Malaysia. The white world, in their own way, were saying that all these blacks amounted to nothing, for power was white and when white power is withdrawn a vacuum is created, which could only be filled by another white power.

By being made into colonials, black people lost the power which we previously had of governing our own affairs, and the aim of the white imperialist world is to see that we never regain this power. The Congo provides an example of this situation. There was a large and well-developed Congolese empire before the white man reached Africa. The large Congolese empire of the fifteenth century was torn apart by Portuguese slave traders, and what remained of the Congo came to be regarded as one of the darkest spots in dark Africa. After regaining political independence the Congolese people settled down to their lives, but white power intervened, set up the black stooge Tshombe, and murdered both Lumumba and the aspirations of the Congolese people. Since then, paid white mercenaries have harassed the Congo. Late last year, 130 of these hired white killers were chased out of the Congo and cornered in the neighbouring African state of Burundi. The white world intervened and they have all been set free. These are men who for months were murdering, raping, pillaging, disrupting economic production, and making a mockery of black life and black society. Yet white power said not a hair on their heads was to be touched. They did not even have to stand trial or reveal their names. Conscious blacks cannot possibly fail to realise that in our own homelands we have no power, abroad we are discriminated against, and everywhere the black masses suffer from poverty. You can put together in your own mind a picture of the whole world, with the white imperialist beast crouched over miserable blacks. And don't forget to label us poor. There is nothing with which poverty coincides so absolutely as the colour black – small or large population, hot or cold climates, rich or poor in natural resources – poverty cuts across all of these factors in order to find black people.

That association of wealth with whites and poverty with blacks is not accidental. It is the nature of the imperialist relationship that enriches the metropolis at the expense of the colony, i.e., it makes the whites richer and the blacks poorer.

The Spaniards went to Central and South America and robbed thousands of tons of silver and gold from Indians. The whole of Europe developed on the basis of that wealth, while millions of Indian lives were lost and the societies and cultures of Central and South America were seriously dislocated. Europeans used their guns in Asia to force Asians to trade at huge profits to Europe, and in India the British grew fat while at the

same time destroying Indian irrigation. Africa and Africans suffered from the greatest crimes at the hands of Europeans through the slave trade and slavery in the West Indies and the Americas. In all those centuries of exploitation, Europeans have climbed higher on our backs and pushed us down into the dirt. White power has, therefore, used black people to make whites stronger and richer and to make blacks relatively, and sometimes absolutely, weaker and poorer.

'Black Power' as a movement has been most clearly defined in the USA. Slavery in the US helped create the capital for the development of the US as the foremost capitalist power, and the blacks have subsequently been the most exploited sector of labour. Many blacks live in that supposedly great society at a level of existence comparable to blacks in the poorest section of the colonial world. The blacks in the US have no power. They have achieved prominence in a number of ways – they can sing, they can run, they can box, play baseball, etc., but they have no power. Even in the fields where they excel, they are straws in the hands of whites. The entertainment world, the record-manufacturing business, sport as a commercial enterprise are all controlled by whites – blacks simply perform. They have no power in the areas where they are overwhelming majorities, such as the city slums and certain parts of the southern United States, for the local governments and law-enforcement agencies are all white controlled. This was not always so. For one brief period after the Civil War in the 1860s, blacks in the USA held power. In that period (from 1865 to 1875) slavery had just ended, and the blacks were entitled to the vote as free citizens. Being in the majority in several parts of the southern United States, they elected a majority of their own black representatives and helped to rebuild the South, introducing advanced ideas such as education for all (blacks as well as whites, rich and poor). The blacks did not rule the United States, but they were able to put forward their own viewpoints and to impose their will over the white, racist minority in several states. This is a concrete historical example of Black Power in the United States, but the whites changed all that, and they have seen to it that such progress was never again achieved by blacks. With massive white immigration, the blacks became a smaller minority within the United States as a whole, and even in the South, so that a feeling of hopelessness grew up.

The present Black Power movement in the United States is a rejection of hopelessness and the policy of doing nothing to halt the oppression of

blacks by whites. It recognises the absence of Black Power, but is confident of the potential of Black Power on this globe. Marcus Garvey was one of the first advocates of Black Power and is still today the greatest spokesman ever to have been produced by the movement of black consciousness. ‘A race without power and authority is a race without respect,’ wrote Garvey. He spoke to all Africans on the earth, whether they lived in Africa, South America, the West Indies or North America, and he made blacks aware of their strength when united. The USA was his main field of operation, after he had been chased out of Jamaica by the sort of people who today pretend to have made him a hero. All of the black leaders who have advanced the cause in the USA since Garvey’s time have recognised the international nature of the struggle against white power. Malcolm X, our martyred brother, became the greatest threat to white power in the USA because he began to seek a broader basis for his efforts in Africa and Asia, and he was probably the first individual who was prepared to bring the race question in the US up before the UN as an issue of international importance. SNCC, the important Black Power organisation, developed along the same lines; and at about the same time that the slogan *Black Power* came into existence a few years ago, SNCC was setting up a foreign affairs department, headed by James Foreman, who afterwards travelled widely in Africa. Stokely Carmichael has held serious discussions in Vietnam, Cuba and the progressive African countries, such as Tanzania and Guinea. These are all steps to tap the vast potential of power among the hundreds of millions of oppressed black peoples.

Meanwhile, one significant change had occurred since Garvey. The emphasis within the US is that black people there have a stake in that land, which they have watered with their sweat, tears, and blood, and black leadership is aware of the necessity and the desirability of fighting white power simultaneously at home and abroad. Certain issues are not yet clear about the final shape of society in America. Some form of coexistence with whites is the desired goal of virtually all black leaders, but it must be a society which blacks have a hand in shaping, and blacks should have power commensurate with their numbers and contribution to US development. To get that, they have to fight.

Black Power as a slogan is new, but it is really an ideology and a movement of historical depth. The one feature that is new about it as it is currently exercised in the US is the advocacy of violence. Previously, black

people prayed, we were on our best behaviour, we asked the whites ‘please’, we smiled so that our white teeth illuminated our black faces. Now it is time to show our teeth in a snarl rather than a smile. The death of Martin Luther King gave several hypocritical persons the opportunity to make stupid remarks about the virtues of non-violence. Some of the statements made in the Jamaica press and on the radio and TV were made by individuals who probably think that the Jamaican black man is completely daft. We were told that violence in itself is evil, and that, whatever the cause, it is unjustified morally. By what standard of morality can the violence used by a slave to break his chains be considered the same as the violence of a slave master? By what standards can we equate the violence of blacks who have been oppressed, suppressed, depressed and repressed for four centuries with the violence of white fascists? Violence aimed at the recovery of human dignity and at equality cannot be judged by the same yardstick as violence aimed at maintenance of discrimination and oppression.

White Americans would certainly argue the moral and practical necessity of their participation in the First and, particularly, the Second World War. What is curious is that thousands of black people fought and died in these wars entirely in the interest of the white man. Colonialism is the opposite of freedom and democracy, and yet black colonials fought for this against the Fascism of Hitler – it was purely in the interests of the white ‘Mother Countries’. Slaves fought for American Independence and for the North in the American Civil War. Black oppressed Americans went in thousands to fight for justice in the world wars, in Korea and in Vietnam. We have fought heroically in the white men’s cause. It is time to fight in our own.

Violence in the American situation is inescapable. White society is violent, white American society is particularly violent, and white American society is especially violent towards blacks.

Slavery was founded and maintained by violence, and in the one hundred years since the ‘emancipation’ of slaves in the US, the society has continued to do black people violence by denying them any power or influence (except for the occasional individual). Their interests are therefore ignored, so that thousands of black babies die each year because of lack of proper food, shelter and medicine; while hundreds of thousands are destroyed emotionally and intellectually because of conditions of poverty

and discrimination. This is the worst sort of violence, and it is accompanied by many acts of individual violence against blacks carried out by white citizens, police and sheriffs.[1] Most incidents of rioting in recent years arose spontaneously out of self-defence and out of anger against brutality. When black Americans react to meet force with force, this should surprise nobody, because even the most harmless animal will finally turn in desperation against its hunters. It is useful to know that this is the conclusion arrived at not only by Black Power leaders, but also by the official committee of the US Senate which was appointed to investigate the racial situation.

Apart from local violent protest (riots), US society faces the possibility of large-scale racial war. The book *Black Power*, written by Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton (and now banned by 'white power' Jamaican government), stresses that its aim was to present an opportunity to work out the racial question without resort to force, but that if that opportunity was missed the society was moving towards destructive racial war. In such a war, black people would undoubtedly suffer because of their minority position, but as an organised group they could wreck untold damage on the whites. The white racists and warmongers cannot drop their bombs on black people *within the USA*, and whatever damage is done to property means damage to white property. We have nothing to lose, for they are the capitalists. Black people could not hope to, nor do they want to, dominate the whites, but large sections of the black youth realise that they cannot shrink from fighting to demonstrate the hard way that a 10 per cent minority of 22 million cannot be treated as though they did not exist. Already the limited violence of the past few years has caused more notice to be taken of the legitimate social, economic, political and cultural demands of black people than has been the case for the previous one hundred years. The goal is still a long way off, for it is not only in a crisis that the blacks must be considered. When decisions are taken in the normal day-to-day life of the USA, the interests of the blacks must be taken into account *out of respect for their power* – power that can be used destructively if it is not allowed to express itself constructively. This is what Black Power means in the particular conditions of the USA.

3

Black Power – Its Relevance to the West Indies

About a fortnight ago, I had the opportunity of speaking on Black Power to an audience on this campus.[1] At that time, the consciousness among students as far as the racial question is concerned had been heightened by several incidents on the world scene – notably, the hangings in Rhodesia and the murder of Dr Martin Luther King. Indeed, it has been heightened to such an extent that some individuals have started to organise a Black Power movement. My presence here attests to my full sympathy with their objectives.

The topic on this occasion is no longer just ‘Black Power’, but ‘Black Power and You’. Black Power can be seen as a movement and an ideology springing from the reality of oppression of black peoples by whites within the imperialist world as a whole. Now, we need to be specific in defining the West Indian scene and our own particular roles in the society. You and I have to decide whether we want to think black or to *remain* as a dirty version of white. (I shall indicate the full significance of this later.)

Recently there was a public statement in *Scope* where Black Power was referred to as ‘Black supremacy’. This may have been a genuine error or a deliberate falsification. Black Power is a call to black peoples to throw off white domination and resume the handling of their own destinies. It means that blacks would enjoy power commensurate with their numbers in the

world and in particular localities. Whenever an oppressed black man shouts for equality, he is called a racist. This was said of Marcus Garvey in his day. Imagine that! We are so inferior that if we demand equality of opportunity and power, that is outrageously racist! Black people who speak up for their rights must beware of this device of false accusations. It is intended to place you on the defensive and if possible embarrass you into silence. How can we be both oppressed and embarrassed? Is it that our major concern is not to hurt the feelings of the oppressor? Black people must now take the offensive – if it is anyone who should suffer embarrassment, it is the whites. Did black people roast six million Jews? Who exterminated millions of indigenous inhabitants in the Americas and Australia? Who enslaved countless millions of Africans? The white capitalist cannibal has always fed on the world's black peoples. White capitalist imperialist society is profoundly and unmistakably racist.

The West Indies have always been a part of white capitalist society. We have been the most oppressed section because we were a slave society and the legacy of slavery still rests heavily upon the West Indian black man. I will briefly point to five highlights of our social development: (1) the development of racialism under slavery; (2) emancipation; (3) Indian indentured labour; (4) the year 1865 in Jamaica; (5) the year 1938 in the West Indies.

Slavery. As C. L. R. James, Eric Williams and other WI scholars have pointed out, slavery in the West Indies started as an economic phenomenon rather than a racial one. But it rapidly became racist as all white labour was withdrawn from the fields, leaving black to be identified with slave labour and white to be linked with property and domination. Out of this situation where blacks had an inferior status in practice, there grew social and scientific theories relating to the supposed inherent inferiority of the black man, who was considered as having been created to bring water and hew wood for the white man. This theory then served to rationalise white exploitation of blacks all over Africa and Asia. The West Indies and the American South share the dubious distinction of being the breeding ground for world racialism. Naturally, our own society provided the highest expressions of racialism. Even the blacks became convinced of their own inferiority, though fortunately we are capable of the most intense expressions when we recognise that we have been duped by the white men.

Black Power recognises both the reality of black oppression and self-negation as well as the potential for revolt.

Emancipation. By the end of the eighteenth century, Britain had got most of what it wanted from black labour in the West Indies. Slavery and the slave trade had made Britain strong and now stood in the way of new developments, so it was time to abandon those systems. The slave trade and slavery were thus ended; but Britain had to consider how to squeeze what little remained in the territories and *how to maintain the local whites in power*. They therefore decided to give the planters £20 million compensation and to guarantee their black labour supplies for the next six years through a system called apprenticeship. In that period, white society consolidated its position to ensure that slave relations should persist in our society. The Rastafari brethren have always insisted that the black people were promised £20 million at emancipation. In reality, by any normal standards of justice, we black people should have got the £20 million compensation money. We were the ones who had been abused and wronged, hunted in Africa and brutalised on the plantations. In Europe, when serfdom was abolished, the serfs usually inherited the land as compensation and by right. In the West Indies, the exploiters were compensated because they could no longer exploit us in the same way as before. White property was of greater value than black humanity. It still is – white property is of greater value than black humanity in the British West Indies today, especially here in Jamaica.

Indian Indentured Labour. Britain and the white West Indians had to maintain the plantation system in order to keep white supreme. When Africans started leaving the plantations to set up as independent peasants, they threatened the plantation structure, and therefore Indians were imported under the indenture arrangements. That was possible because white power controlled most of the world and could move nonwhite peoples around as they wished. It was from British-controlled India that the indentured labour was obtained. It was the impact of British commercial, military and political policies that was destroying the life and culture of nineteenth-century India and forcing people to flee to other parts of the world to earn bread. Look where Indians fled – to the West Indies! The West Indies is a place black people want to leave, not to come to. One must therefore appreciate the pressure of white power on India which gave rise to migration to the West Indies. Indians were brought here solely in the

interest of white society – at the expense of Africans already in the West Indies and often against their own best interests, for Indians perceived indentured labour to be a form of slavery, and it was eventually terminated through the pressure of Indian opinion in the homeland. The West Indies has made a unique contribution to the history of suffering in the world, and Indians have provided part of that contribution since indentures were first introduced. This is another aspect of the historical situation which is still with us.

1865. In that year Britain found a way of perpetuating white power in the West Indies after ruthlessly crushing the revolt of our black brothers led by Paul Bogle. The British government took away the constitution of Jamaica and placed the island under the complete control of the Colonial Office, a manoeuvre that was racially motivated. The Jamaican legislature was then largely in the hands of the local whites, with a mulatto minority, but if the gradual changes continued the mulattoes would have taken control – and the blacks were next in line. Consequently, the British government put a stop to the process of the gradual takeover of political power by blacks. When we look at the British Empire in the nineteenth century, we see a clear difference between white colonies and black colonies. In the white colonies like Canada and Australia, the British were giving white people their freedom and self-rule. In the black colonies of the West Indies, Africa and Asia, the British were busy taking away the political freedom of the inhabitants. Actually, on the constitutional level, Britain had already displayed its racialism in the West Indies in the early nineteenth century when it refused to give mulattoes the power of government in Trinidad, although they were the majority of free citizens. In 1865 in Jamaica it was not the first nor the last time on which Britain made it clear that its white ‘kith and kin’ would be supported to hold dominion over blacks.

1938. Slavery ended in various islands of the West Indies between 1834 and 1838. Exactly one hundred years later (between 1934–38) the black people in the West Indies revolted against the hypocritical freedom of the society. The British were very surprised – they had long forgotten all about the blacks in the British West Indies, and they sent a royal commission to find out what it was all about. The report of the conditions was so shocking that the British government did not release it until after the war, because they wanted black colonials to fight the white man’s battles. By the time the war ended, it was clear in the West Indies and throughout Asia and Africa

that some concessions would have to be made to black peoples. In general, the problem as seen by white imperialists was to give enough power to certain groups in colonial society to keep the whole society from exploding and to maintain the essentials of the imperialist structure. In the British West Indies, they had to take into account the question of military strategy because we lie under the belly of the world's imperialist giant, the USA. Besides, there was the new and vital mineral bauxite, which had to be protected. The British solution was to pull out wherever possible and leave the imperial government in the hands of the USA, while the local government was given to a white, brown and black petty bourgeoisie who were culturally the creations of white capitalist society and who therefore support the white imperialist system because they gain personally and because they have been brainwashed into aiding the oppression of black people.

Black Power in the West Indies means three closely related things: (1) the break with imperialism which is historically white racist; (2) the assumption of power by the black masses in the islands; (3) the cultural reconstruction of the society in the image of the blacks.

I shall anticipate certain questions on who are the blacks in the West Indies, since they are in fact questions which have been posed to me elsewhere. I maintain that it is the white world which has defined who are blacks – if you are not white, then you are black. However, it is obvious that the West Indian situation is complicated by factors such as the variety of racial types and racial mixtures, and by the process of class formation. We have, therefore, to note not simply what the white world says but also how individuals perceive each other. Nevertheless, we can talk of the mass of the West Indian population as being black – either African or Indian. There seem to have been some doubts on the last point and some fear that Black Power is aimed against the Indian. This would be a flagrant denial of both the historical experience of the West Indies and the reality of the contemporary scene.

When the Indian was brought to the West Indies, he met the same racial contempt which whites applied to Africans. The Indian, too, was reduced to a single stereotype – the coolie or labourer. He too was a hewer of wood and a bringer of water. I spoke earlier of the revolt of the blacks in the West Indies in 1938. That revolt involved Africans in Jamaica, Africans and Indians in Trinidad and Guyana. The uprisings in Guyana were actually led

by Indian sugar workers. Today, some Indians (like some Africans) have joined the white power structure in terms of economic activity and culture; but the underlying reality is that poverty resides among Africans and Indians in the West Indies and that power is denied them. Black Power in the West Indies, therefore, refers primarily to people who are recognisably African or Indian.

The Chinese, on the other hand, are a former labouring group who have now become bastions of white West Indian social structure. The Chinese of the People's Republic of China have long broken with and are fighting against white imperialism, but our Chinese have nothing to do with that movement. They are to be identified with Chiang Kai-shek and not Chairman Mao Tse-tung. They are to be put in the same bracket as the lackeys of capitalism and imperialism who are to be found in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Whatever the circumstances in which the Chinese came to the West Indies, they soon became (as a group) members of the exploiting class. They will have either to relinquish or be deprived of that function before they can be reintegrated into a West Indian society where the black man walks in dignity.

The same applies to the mulattoes, another group about whom I have been questioned. The West Indian brown man is characterised by ambiguity and ambivalence. He has in the past identified with the black masses when it suited his interests, and at the present time some browns are in the forefront of the movement towards black consciousness; but the vast majority have fallen to the bribes of white imperialism, often outdoing the whites in their hatred and oppression of blacks. Garvey wrote of the Jamaican mulattoes: 'I was openly hated and persecuted by some of these coloured men of the island who did not want to be classified as Negroes but as white.' Naturally, conscious West Indian blacks like Garvey have in turn expressed their dislike for the browns, but there is nothing in the West Indian experience which suggests that browns are unacceptable when they choose to identify with blacks. The post-1938 developments in fact showed exactly the opposite. It seems to me, therefore, that it is not for the Black Power movement to determine the position of the browns, reds and so-called West Indian whites; the movement can only keep the door open and leave it to those groups to make their choice.

Black Power is not racially intolerant. It is the hope of the black man that he should have power over his own destinies. This is not incompatible

with a multiracial society where each individual counts equally. Because the moment that power is equitably distributed among several ethnic groups, the very relevance of making the distinction between groups will be lost. What we must object to is the current image of a multiracial society living in harmony – that is a myth designed to justify the exploitation suffered by the blackest of our population, at the hands of the lighter-skinned groups. Let us look at the figures for the racial composition of the Jamaican population. Of every one hundred Jamaicans,

76.8 per cent are visibly African;
0.8 per cent European;
1.1 per cent Indian;
0.6 per cent Chinese;
91 per cent have African blood;
0.1 per cent Syrian;
14.6 per cent Afro-European;
5.4 per cent other mixtures.

This is a black society where Africans preponderate. Apart from the mulatto mixture, all other groups are numerically insignificant, and yet the society seeks to give them equal weight and indeed more weight than the Africans. If we went to Britain we could easily find nonwhite groups in the above proportions[2] – Africans and West Indians, Indians and Pakistanis, Turks, Arabs and other Easterners – but Britain is not called a multiracial society. When we go to Britain we don't expect to take over all of the British real estate business, all their cinemas and most of their commerce, as the European, Chinese and Syrian have done here. All we ask for there is some work and shelter, and we can't even get that. Black Power must proclaim that Jamaica is a black society – we should fly Garvey's Black Star banner, and we will treat all other groups in the society on that understanding – they can have *the basic right of all individuals* but *no privileges to exploit Africans* as has been the pattern during slavery and ever since.

The present government knows that Jamaica is a black man's country. That is why Garvey has been made a national hero, for they are trying to deceive black people into thinking that the government is with them. The government of Jamaica recognises black power – it is afraid of the potential wrath of Jamaica's black and largely African population. It is that same fear which forced them to declare mourning when black men were murdered in Rhodesia, and when Martin Luther King was murdered in the USA. But the

black people don’t need to be told that Garvey is a national hero – they know that. Nor do they need to be told to mourn when blacks are murdered by white power, because they mourn every day right here in Jamaica where white power keeps them ignorant, unemployed, ill-clothed and ill-fed. They will stop mourning when things change – and that means a revolution, for the first essential is to break the chains which bind us to white imperialists, and that is a very revolutionary step. Cuba is the only country in the West Indies and in this hemisphere which has broken with White Power. That is why Stokely Carmichael can visit Cuba, but he can’t visit Trinidad or Jamaica. That is why Stokely can call Fidel ‘one of the blackest men in the Americas’, and that is why our leaders in contrast qualify as ‘white’.

Here I’m not just playing with words – I’m extending the definition of Black Power by indicating the nature of its opposite, ‘white power’, and I’m providing a practical illustration of what Black Power means in one particular West Indian community where it had already occurred. White power is the power of whites over blacks without any participation of the blacks. White power rules the imperialist world as a whole. In Cuba the blacks and mulattoes numbered 1,585,073 out of a population of 5,829,029 in 1953 – i.e., about one-quarter of the population. Like Jamaica’s black people today, they were the poorest and most depressed people on the island. Lighter-skinned Cubans held local power, while real power was in the hands of the US imperialists. Black Cubans fought alongside white Cuban workers and peasants because they were all oppressed. Major Juan Almeida, one of the outstanding leaders of Cuba today, was one of the original guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra, and he is black. Black Cubans today enjoy political, economic and social rights and opportunities of exactly the same kind as white Cubans. They too bear arms in the Cuban Militia as an expression of their basic rights. In other words, White power in Cuba is ended. The majority of the white population naturally predominates numerically in most spheres of activity, but they do not hold dominion over blacks without regard to the latter’s interests. The blacks have achieved power commensurate with their own numbers by their heroic self-efforts during the days of slavery, in fighting against the Spanish and in fighting against imperialism. Having achieved their rights, they can in fact afford to forget the category ‘black’ and think simply as Cuban citizens, as Socialist equals and as men. In Jamaica, where blacks are far greater in numbers and have no whites alongside them as oppressed workers and

peasants, it will be the black people who alone can bear the brunt of revolutionary fighting.

Trotsky once wrote that revolution is the carnival of the masses. When we have that carnival in the West Indies, are people like us here at the university going to join the bacchanal?

Let us have a look at our present position. Most of us who have studied at the UWI are discernibly black, and yet we are undeniably part of the white imperialist system. A few are actively pro-imperialist. They have no confidence in anything that is not white – they talk nonsense about black people being lazy – the same nonsense which was said about the Jamaican black man after emancipation, although he went to Panama and performed the giant task of building the Panama Canal – the same nonsense which is said about WI unemployed today, and yet they proceed to England to run the whole transport system. Most of us do not go to quite the same extremes in denigrating ourselves and our black brothers, but we say nothing against the system, and that means that we are acquiescing in the exploitation of our brethren. One of the ways that the situation has persisted, especially in recent times, is that it has given a few individuals like you and I a vision of personal progress measured in terms of front lawn and of the latest model of a huge American car. This has recruited us into their ranks and deprived the black masses of articulate leadership. That is why at the outset I stressed that our choice was to *remain* as part of the white system or to break with it. There is no other alternative.

Black Power in the WI must aim at transforming the Black intelligentsia into the servants of the black masses. Black Power, within the university and without, must aim at overcoming white cultural imperialism. Whites have dominated us both physically and mentally. This fact is brought out in virtually any serious sociological study of the region – the brainwashing process has been so stupendous that it has convinced so many black men of their inferiority. I will simply draw a few illustrations to remind you of this fact which blacks like us at Mona prefer to forget.

The adult black in our West Indian society is fully conditioned to thinking white, because that is the training we are given from childhood. The little black girl plays with a white doll, identifying with it as she combs its flaxen hair. Asked to sketch the figure of a man or woman, the black schoolboy instinctively produces a white man or a white woman. This is not surprising, since until recently the illustrations in our textbooks were all

figures of Europeans. The few changes which have taken place have barely scratched the surface of the problem. West Indians of every colour still aspire to European standards of dress and beauty. The language which is used by black people in describing ourselves shows how we despise our African appearance. ‘Good hair’ means European hair, ‘good nose’ means a straight nose, ‘good complexion’ means a light complexion. Everybody recognises how incongruous and ridiculous such terms are, but we continue to use them and to express our support of the assumption that white Europeans have the monopoly of beauty, and that black is the incarnation of ugliness. That is why Black Power advocates find it necessary to assert that BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL.

The most profound revelation of the sickness of our society on the question of race is our respect for all the white symbols of the Christian religion. God the Father is white, God the Son is white, and presumably God the Holy Ghost is white also. The disciples and saints are white, all the Cherubim, Seraphim and angels are white – except Lucifer, of course, who was black, being the embodiment of evil. When one calls upon black people to reject these things, this is not an attack on the teachings of Christ or the ideals of Christianity. What we have to ask is ‘Why should Christianity come to us all wrapped up in white?’ The white race constitutes about 20 per cent of the world’s population, and yet nonwhite peoples are supposed to accept that all who inhabit the heavens are white. There are 650 million Chinese, so why shouldn’t God and most of the angels be Chinese? The truth is that there is absolutely no reason why different racial groups should not provide themselves with their own religious symbols. A picture of Christ could be red, white or black, depending upon the people who are involved. When Africans adopt the European concept that purity and goodness must be painted white and all that is evil and damned is to be painted black, then we are flagrantly self-insulting.

Through the manipulation of this media of education and communication, white people have produced black people who administer the system and perpetuate the white values – ‘white-hearted black men’, as they are called by conscious elements. This is as true of the Indians as it is true of the Africans in our West Indian society. Indeed, the basic explanation of the tragedy of African/Indian confrontation in Guyana and Trinidad is the fact that both groups are held captive by the European way of seeing things. When an African abuses an Indian, he repeats all that the

white men said about Indian indentured ‘coolies’; and in turn the Indian has borrowed from the whites the stereotype of the ‘lazy nigger’ to apply to the African beside him. It is as though no black man can see another black man except by looking through a white person. It is time we started seeing through our own eyes. The road to Black Power here in the West Indies and everywhere else must begin with a revaluation of ourselves as blacks and with a redefinition of the world from our own standpoint.

4

African History and Culture

I

Every human society has a history and a form of culture, and this includes Africa. Africans in the West have been *deliberately* kept ignorant of African achievements by the white men for centuries. The purpose of their policy was to build up a picture of a barbarous Africa, so that we Africans who had been removed from our homes and made into slaves would be afraid to admit even to ourselves that we were Africans. In the West Indies, names like ‘Bungo’ and ‘Quashie’, which refer to Africans, are names which most black people hate, and our knowledge of Africa is got from reading Tarzan comic books.

We are the only group in the world who deny ourselves, preferring to be known as ‘Negroes’ rather than Africans. In order to know ourselves we must learn about African history and culture. This is one of the most important steps towards creating unity among Africans at home and abroad.

Africa is the home of mankind. The human being came into existence on the African continent nearly 2 million years ago; and human society and culture reached great heights in Africa before the white men arrived. We must learn something about the following African kingdoms and empires.

(a) On the River Nile, there was Egypt and Meroe (Sudan). These kingdoms flourished on earth before the birth of Christ, and Egypt in particular is recognised as having contributed greatly to the modern world. Its huge pyramids and sculptures are still considered as wonders,

and mankind has never re-discovered some of the technical skills which the Egyptians possessed, such as the art of preserving the dead body. Europeans have long refused to accept the simple geographical fact that ancient Egypt (like modern Egypt) was an African country, and even though some of its culture came from Asia, its achievements must go to the credit of Africa.

Meroe produced a culture very similar to Egypt, and also ruled over Egypt for a long period. The Egyptians were Africans of a light complexion, while the people of Meroe were dark skinned.

(b) In ancient Ethiopia, there was the kingdom of Axum, forerunner to the Ethiopian kingdom. The written language of Axum was called 'Ge'ez', and it is still used within the Ethiopian church today. Axum, along with other parts of ancient Ethiopia, is famous for its architecture, especially its tall and finely carved stone pillars and its churches carved out of solid rock.

(c) In West Africa, some of the most powerful political states in Africa began to develop some 1,500 years ago, and their period of greatness lasted for more than 1,200 years. These kingdoms bore the names of Ghana, Mali, Songhai and Kanem; and they all arose near the great Niger River. They were noted for their agricultural production, their learning and their commerce, especially in gold. These states also encouraged the religion of Islam (while Ethiopia, of course, was the centre of Christianity).

II

Apart from the states of Egypt, Meroe, Axum, Ghana, Mali, Songhai and Kanem, which have already been mentioned, there were many others in different parts of Africa which achieved greatness before the arrival of the white man and before we were snatched away as slaves. On the West African coast, the states of Benin and Oyo were famous; in Central Africa we can take as examples Kongo and Monomotapa (Zimbabwe); and in East Africa two of the oldest kingdoms were those of Bunyoro and Buganda. All of these are strange names because we have never been taught anything about them. If we want to call ourselves conscious Africans, then we must know the map of Africa, we must remember the names of these great African states, and we must find out as much as possible about them.

However, the majority of Africans lived in small societies, and these must also be seriously studied. Sometimes, it is felt that only in large political states can one find civilisation and culture, but this is wrong, and in the great political states of Europe and America today, many human values have been destroyed; while even the smallest African village was a place for the development and the protection of the individual.

Certain things were outstanding in the African way of life, whether in a small or large society. These distinctive things in the African way of life

amount to African culture. Among the principles of African culture the following are to be noted: hospitality, respect (especially to elders), importance of the woman (especially in cases of inheritance), humane treatment of lawbreakers, spiritual reflection, common use of the land, constant employment of music (especially drums) and bright colours. Some of these principles are found in many different human societies, but very few are encouraged in the present white capitalist world. Even in Africa itself, European slave trading and colonisation have destroyed many aspects of African culture. But culture is not a dead thing, nor does it always remain the same. It belongs to living people and is therefore always developing. If we, the blacks in the West, accept ourselves as African, we can make a contribution to the development of African culture, helping to free it from European imperialism.

What we need is confidence in ourselves, so that as blacks and Africans we can be conscious, united, independent and creative. A knowledge of African achievements in art, education, religion, politics, agriculture and the mining of metals can help us gain the necessary confidence which has been removed by slavery and colonialism.

Marcus Garvey always preached the value of African history and culture. He wrote that ‘for many years white propagandists have been printing tons of literature to impress scattered Ethiopia, especially that portion within their civilisation, with the idea that Africa is a despised place, inhabited by savages and cannibals, where no civilised human being should go’. After dismissing that propaganda as completely false, Garvey continued: ‘The power and the sway we once held passed away, but now in the twentieth century we are about to see a return of it in the rebuilding of Africa; yes, a new civilisation, a new culture, shall spring up from among our people.’

III

On the physical side, man is an animal, but is different from other animals in several important ways. The three most outstanding physical qualities are the following:

(a) Man walks upright.
(b) Human hands are adapted to making and handling tools.

(c) Man's comparatively bigger brain allows for higher thought, and man is referred to as *Homo sapiens*, which means 'thinking man'.

Homo sapiens first came into existence on the African continent. This fact has been established by archaeologists (people who study the material evidence of past society, usually by digging into the ground), by paleontologists (people who study the ancient climate and structure of the earth), and by other scientists who can find out the age of bones and rocks that existed millions of years ago. What these scholars say is that nearly 2 million years ago, man evolved in Africa, long before he came into existence elsewhere. Numerous remains of early human types have been found in eastern Africa, and a place in Tanzania called Olduvai Gorge is especially famous.

Man in Africa (like man everywhere else) adjusted to his physical surroundings to produce human society and culture. The first form of society came about when individuals got together to hunt in groups.

Probably the most important development in human history was the invention of agriculture. Strange as this may seem today, there was a time when the idea of growing crops and rearing animals did not occur to man. When the idea came about, hundreds of years were spent in collecting wild grasses and roots, which were brought into the service of man. Wild animals such as the cow and the horse were also tamed and used by man. It was in the Middle East that agriculture started about 10,000 years before the birth of Christ, because that region was well supplied by nature with grasses such as wheat and barley. Agriculture spread rapidly into Africa by way of Egypt. In the grasslands of Ethiopia and West Africa, certain new grain species were first brought into human use from the wild variety. Those grains form the millet family. Africa was also the home of certain varieties of rice, yam, beans, fruit, etc. Agriculture meant food to support a growing population, and people settled down to build a stable society.

All over the world, the greatest challenge to man was his environment or physical surroundings. Man in Africa learnt to overcome the problems of his own environment. Advanced methods of agriculture developed in Africa many hundreds of years before Europeans went to that continent. Irrigation, terracing and crop rotation were all practised.

The other basic aspect of material culture is concerned with the working of metals and the making of metal tools. Here again, metalworking spread into Africa from the Middle East, becoming widespread long before the

European arrival, and in some cases the metal technology was highly developed. Africans in the Congo were famous for mining copper and those in the Sudan famous for their iron. Apart from tools and weapons, metals were used for ornament, and here gold played its part. What all of the above really mean is that *ancient Africa was in the mainstream of human history.*

IV

Apart from the material aspect of culture, man has always produced things of the spirit. In fact, the development of religion, literature and art is associated with higher forms of culture and civilisation. In all of these fields Africa can be proud of her achievements. Take, for example, the art of Africa. European books on the early development of man always praise the paintings and engravings made by man long ago in France, Germany, etc. There are similar paintings all over Africa, placed on huge rocks and showing the great variety of animals which are found on the African continent and which were hunted by Africans. The paintings and engravings, like man himself, appeared at a much-earlier date in Africa than in Europe. As man progressed, he moved from simple rock paintings to sculpture. *African sculpture* in wood, copper, bronze and iron is recognised by the whole world both for the remarkable skill with which the sculptured objects are produced and for their expression of beauty, dignity and other human spiritual qualities.

Black Africans have developed in the same way as all mankind and have made their own contributions to humanity, because we are simply a part of a single species – *Homo sapiens*, or ‘thinking man’, as mentioned before. *Skin colour by itself is insignificant*. Some black Africans have given birth to white *albino* children (known in Jamaica as ‘dunduss’), but these children are really no different from their parents. In man’s physical makeup, one of the most fundamental things is the type of blood; and blood groups do not conform to skin colour. In other words, an African is physically closer to a European with the same blood group than he is to another African of a different blood type.

Colour has become important because the white men found it convenient to use racialism to exploit the black peoples of the world. As Africans, we will use the question of race to unify ourselves and to escape

from the oppression at the hands of white men and their black lackeys. *So long as there are people who deny our humanity as blacks, then for so long must we proclaim and assert our humanity as blacks*. That is why our historical and cultural heritage is so important, and that is why we must proceed to live our culture because culture is a way of life. We must recover what was taken away from us, and we must adapt in order to survive and keep on growing as a section of humanity.

Here it is very important to notice the question of technology. Europeans accuse black people of not inventing the wheel. They claim that our culture never included the construction of machines which work on the principle of the wheel – e.g., mills and wheeled transport. This is partly true, but all that can be said is that we never borrowed the principle of the wheel, for it was invented in China and borrowed by Europeans. Where our history and culture lack certain things, there is nothing wrong in borrowing. His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor Haile Selassie, was the first African to realise the importance of the European invention of aircraft and sought aeroplanes, not to be like Europeans, but to protect Ethiopian culture by strengthening it with something new. AFRICANS (ESPECIALLY YOUTHS) MUST LEARN NEW SKILLS.

V

The Nile Civilisations. The Nile is one of the great rivers of Africa and of the world. One branch, the Blue Nile, starts in Ethiopia, while the White Nile starts in Uganda. They come together in the Sudan and then flow through Egypt to the sea. Few sights are more spectacular than the Murchison Falls on the White Nile and the Tisisat Falls on the Blue Nile; but the Nile is famous not just because of its length and great beauty, but because it is the cradle of ancient civilisations.

The history of Egypt of the pharaohs is well known, and it should not be difficult to obtain a good book (with photographs). White people are quick to deny that ancient Egyptians were Africans, by which they mean that Egyptians were not black. The ancient Egyptians usually portrayed themselves as ‘red’, and their empire included black subjects from further up the Nile. Red intermarried with black, and for many years a line of black kings ruled Egypt. There is no evidence to show that racial discrimination

was part of their culture. Yet, according to the white men's way of seeing things, the red and the black populations of Egypt would have been classed as 'coloured' or 'Negro'. Christ was a member of the Essene group of Jews from Egypt. Were he alive today, he would suffer from racial discrimination.

One of the Nile kingdoms which is much less known than Egypt is that of *Kush* (sometimes called *Meroe*, which was the capital city for a long time). Kush was situated in the northern Sudan, whose population were black Africans. It was at one time a province of Egypt, but it achieved its independence and built up a society that was scarcely inferior to that of Egypt. In fact, 800 years before the birth of Christ, Kush was powerful enough to invade Egypt and take over the throne of the pharaohs. Their rule in Egypt came to an end more than a hundred years later, when Hittite armies invaded from Syria, armed with superior weapons.

The people of Kush were famous for their manufacture of fine pottery, beads, jewels and ornaments; and they were an important source of gold in the ancient world. The first capital city, Napata, and the second, Meroe, were international trading centres, in touch with Africans in every direction, especially Egypt to the north and Ethiopia to the southeast. Beyond the shores of Africa, they were in touch with Syria, Persia, Rome, Greece and India.

Women played an important part in the political structure of Kush, and this is something found in most parts of black Africa. There were many great queens of Kush, and it is felt that Candace, mentioned in the Bible as queen of Ethiopia, may really have been a queen of Kush.

Kush was not as magnificent as Egypt in the building of pyramids and temples, but in one respect Kush surpassed even the glories of Egypt, and that was in *the manufacture of iron*. Up to today the hills of 'slag' or waste material from iron smelting are still to be seen near Meroe in the Sudan. Meroe was an industrial centre in the heart of Africa, helping to spread the techniques of iron smelting and ironworking to other peoples of the continent.

The names of *KUSH* AND *MEROE* ARE PART OF OUR HISTORICAL HERITAGE AS AFRICANS.

VI

The early history of Ethiopia (*part* 1). The area of Ethiopia is 395,000 square miles, which is about ninety times the size of Jamaica. One-third of the area is high land, and it is in highland Ethiopia that most of the early historical developments took place. This highland was a natural defence against invasion and also a barrier to easy communications with the rest of Africa. In fact, within Ethiopia itself, steep valleys divide the mountains and make it difficult to get from one place to another. The Abai or Blue Nile separates the northern highlands of Amhara and Gojjam from those of Shoa to the south.

The isolated hilltops, or *ambas*, as they are called, were often used as mountain fortresses or as monasteries, such as those of Debra Libanos and Debra Tabor.

Ethiopia is a land of diversity. Many different factors came together to form the Ethiopian empire and culture. There are several different peoples, with different languages, different ways of making a living and different religions. Among the principal groups we find the Amhara, Asau and Galla. The Amhara speak a language which is called ‘Semitic’ (related to the Jewish language), while other peoples speak languages related to Arabic, or to other African languages such as the Nilotic.

On the fertile highlands, the fanners grew the varieties of millet contributed by Ethiopia to Africa and the world. On the grasslands we find ‘pastoralists’ – individuals who specialise in the rearing of cattle – and from early times fishing was of importance in the lakes and rivers. Naturally, modern Ethiopia has many other kinds of workers and skills which were not present from the earliest days.

Many people are surprised by the diversity of religion which still exists in Ethiopia today. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is supreme within the state, but there are large numbers of Muslims and animists (Africans following the old religion of their forefathers), and there are even a number of Jews. All of these people, in spite of different languages, religions, etc., are subjects of the same government, which is today under HIM Emperor Haile Selassie I.

Ethiopians can differ in skin colour from light brown to jet black, but none of them are really different from the black Africans outside Ethiopia. White propaganda likes to suggest that the achievements of Ethiopia are not the achievements of Africa. Marcus Garvey knew about this lying propaganda and made it look ridiculous. He wrote as follows:

> Professor George A. Kersnor, after describing the genius of the Ethiopians and their high culture during the period of 750 B.C. to A.D. 350 in middle Africa, declared the Ethiopians were not African Negroes. He described them as dark coloured races showing a mixture of black blood. Imagine a dark coloured man in middle Africa being anything else but a Negro. Some white men, whether they be professors or not, certainly have a wide range of imagination.

Ancient Ethiopia before the coming of Christianity. In the Ethiopian highlands in ancient times, the main group of people were the Agau. Hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, many people from the Yemen and Arabia crossed the Red Sea into Ethiopia. These were known as *Sabeans*, and they brought the language of Ge’ez which is still used in the Ethiopian church.

The Sabeans were interested in trade, and they set up a number of trading ports and towns on the Eritrean coast of the Red Sea and in the nearby mountains. By far the most important of these towns was *Axum* in the highlands of Tigrea, and Axum was the foundation upon which the Christian empire was later built. Axum (and its Red Sea port of Adulis) were centres of international trade, exporting perfumes, incense, ivory and gold to Egypt, Persia, Syria, India and throughout the Greek and later the

Roman Empire. As such Axum was also a centre of culture, and one of its early kings, Zoscales, spoke and wrote Greek perfectly.

Above all, Axum and similar centres created the first elements of a special Ethiopian culture. The Sabeans became Ethiopians. The relations between the newcomers and the previous inhabitants produced the Amharic language and produced a special form of architecture not found anywhere else outside of Ethiopia. A strong kingdom grew up which spread from Tigrea further into Ethiopia and also across the Red Sea into Yemen and Arabia. Less powerful rulers had to pay tribute to the king of Axum, so that even before the coming of Christianity the king of Ethiopia was a ‘king of kings’.

VII

The Development of the Ethiopian Church and Amharic Culture. Just before the coming of Christianity to the empire of Axum there were three different forms of religion: (i) animist (traditional) beliefs and reverence for ancestors; (ii) belief in the gods of Arabia, such as Mahrem, the god of war; and (iii) the Jewish faith.

Conversion began in the province of Tigre, which was the centre of the ancient empire of Axum. The Christian nature of the Ethiopian kingdom is traced back to the union of Solomon and Sheba and is recorded in the Kebra Nagast, or ‘the Glory of Kings’.

Many Europeans consider the Kebra Nagast and the account of the union of Solomon and Sheba as nothing but a fable with no truth whatsoever. They claim that Sheba was in Arabia and not in Ethiopia, and that Christianity entered Ethiopia for the first time 330 years after the birth of Christ. There are Greek documents which say that about the year AD 330, Azana, the king of Axum, was converted to Christianity by Frumentius, a Syrian bishop sent by the patriarch of Alexandria in Egypt.

On the question of the relations of Solomon with Sheba, it must be remembered that Ethiopia ruled large parts of Arabia, so that even if Sheba was in Arabia, the ‘queen of Sheba’ would still have been one of the titles of the queen of Ethiopia. Furthermore, even if it is impossible to prove the matter historically one way or another, the Kebra Nagast still remains a vital cultural document, which correctly emphasises the ancient nature of the link

between Ethiopia and the Hebrew world before the birth of Christ. This document is a symbol of Amharic culture, for that culture developed out of the relations between Africa and the Near East.

The presence of the *Falashas*, or 'black Jews', in Ethiopia is a very important fact. Some authorities consider them to be one of the ten 'lost tribes' of Israel, and they were among the earliest inhabitants of Ethiopia. This is proved by the fact that their beliefs and system of worship go back to the pattern set by Moses, and they had no knowledge of the more recent developments in the Jewish faith such as the Talmud (the Bible of the modern Jews).

Ethiopia was a major centre in the 'biblical world' – along with Jordan, Syria, Palestine and Egypt. It is clear that Christianity must have begun to spread in Ethiopia from the earliest days of Christ's teachings. What probably happened is that there was a struggle until Christianity gradually became the official religion, and Ethiopia became part of the structure of the international church.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has certain special features:

(a) It is a church based on the people and their way of life. Even when converting 'animists' to Christianity, it respected their previous culture and adopted part of it. For example, while the Western church always tries to suppress African music and any popular music, the Ethiopian church worshipped and celebrated to the sound of drums and other instruments of the people.

Similarly, while the common people of Europe were spoken to by priests in the unknown tongue of Latin, the people of Ethiopia used their own languages (Ge'ez and Amharic) to express themselves inside and outside of the church.

(b) Some of the ancient Hebrew practices of the Ethiopian Falashas were also respected, such as the ban against the eating of pork.

(c) The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has preserved many of the features of the early Christian church, and many of the books in their worship are considered to be 'apocryphal' by the Western church. According to the Western church of Europe, the books of Enoch, Jubilees and Ecclesiasticus are not authentic, but these biblical books which the Ethiopians have today were translated into Ge'ez long before the Western world was familiar with Christian writings.

(d) The Ethiopian Church has a strong tradition of monasticism. Individuals withdrew from the daily life of society to become monks or hermits in isolated places on the *ambas*, or mountaintops. This was due to the influence of the Eastern church, for as part of a world religion, the Ethiopian Orthodox faith had international connections. Ethiopian tradition explains that Frumentius, or *Abba Salama*, was important because he was the first man with authority to ordain priests in Ethiopia under the patriarch of Alexandria in Egypt. Up until 1948, the *abuna*, or archbishop of Ethiopia, was consecrated by the patriarch of Alexandria.

The Ethiopian church has survived for centuries in spite of many dangers. The first threat came from the ‘animist’ Agau peoples. In the tenth century, the Agau, under their Queen Ester, defeated the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia. For 133 years the Solomonic line was deposed by a royal dynasty called the *Zagwe*. However, some of these Zagwe rulers were zealous Christians and kept the Christian empire alive. The most famous Zagwe was called Lalibala. He ruled at the end of the twelfth century and built eleven of the remarkable rock churches of Ethiopia. (They were carved out of solid rock.)

When the Solomonic dynasty returned in AD 1270, they had to fight against the Jews (Falashas) and the Muslims. The important thing to notice is that when the Jews and Muslims were overcome militarily, they still had a place in the social, political and economic life of Ethiopia.

VIII

The Western Sudan. Today, the name ‘Sudan’ is given to the independent African nation which has borders with Egypt and Ethiopia. In earlier times, the whole of Africa south of the Sahara Desert was called in Arabic ‘Bilad es Sudan’, which means ‘land of the blacks’, and the term ‘Western Sudan’ referred to an area which today includes the independent states of Senegal, Mali, Guinea, Niger, Upper Volta and Chad, along with the northern part of Nigeria. This is an area of the greatest importance in the development of African history and culture.

The Western Sudan was an area of grassland and woodland, which had great advantages over the desert country to the north and over the thick forests to the south. It was possible to make rapid progress in agriculture, and this region of Africa produced several new grains suitable for human consumption – three of the most widely used being sorghum, pennisetum and a species of rice which grows in flooded fields.

The Western Sudan was also quick to borrow and master the technical skills of mining and refining iron, after these skills became known in Egypt, Meroe and North Africa. Using iron tools, the inhabitants of the region produced a supply of food which allowed the population to expand.

Apart from food crops they also brought into use a certain variety of cotton. Skilled workers were engaged in the manufacture of iron, cloth and

pottery, and through the exchange of goods over long distances there arose the need for professional traders. The society had therefore become specialised in its economic operation.

The fact that people could move about easily in the open countryside meant that there were constant contacts between the different sections of the Western Sudan. For instance, this was one of the few areas of Africa where it was possible to use horses in large numbers. It means that there was a reasonable degree of unity where things such as language and religion were concerned. It means, too, that there were numerous little things (such as the way people dressed, the way they cooked their meals and the way they greeted each other) which were all done in the same way. There was, therefore, a common culture or way of life in the Western Sudan – a culture that was part of the broader African pattern, but which had certain special features, as we have seen in the case of the Amharic Ethiopian culture.

One of the distinguishing features of the Western Sudan was the fact that it kept producing large kingdoms and political empires. From the earliest centuries of the Christian era right up to the arrival of European colonialists in the last century, the Western Sudan has not lacked complex political states covering huge areas of territory.

It is necessary to conclude the discussion on the Western Sudan, and on the empire of Mali in particular.

Its founder was Sundiata Keita, a political and military genius. Modibo Keita, the first head of state of the republic of Mali, is a descendant of Sundiata Keita. Obviously, this is a source of pride and confidence for the inhabitants of that part of Africa, but we too can share those feelings.

Another famous name in the history of Mali was Mansa Kankan Musa, who was noted both for his military skill and his devotion to Islam. He made a famous pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324, carrying one hundred camel loads of gold, most of which was spent in Egypt and caused dislocation of the Egyptian economy. Mansa Kankan Musa became a legend not only in his own country but also in Egypt, Italy and Arabia, for after his pilgrimage all world maps clearly and accurately included the country of Mali.

That sort of journey had great economic and cultural consequences. It was followed by the exchange of diplomatic missions, and by the arrival in Mali of architects, craftsmen and Muslim teachers. Most foreign visitors went to the city of *Timbuctu*. In the English language Timbuctu ‘is often used in the sense of the most backward place on earth’. Yet, as long ago as

the fourteenth century, when Europe was emerging from its own ‘Dark Ages’, Timbuctu was the largest city in West Africa and one of the most famous in the world as a centre of gold trade and as a city of learning. There were numerous schools at all levels, using the Arabic language; and the Sankore mosque was the home of a University producing theologians, lawyers, linguists and geographers. A visitor to Timbuctu about 450 years ago wrote as follows: ‘In Timbuctu there are numerous judges, doctors and clerics all receiving good salaries from the king. He pays great respect to men of learning. There is a great demand for books in manuscript, imported from Barbary. More profit is made from the book trade than from any other line of business.’ In a city which was renowned for its trade in gold, there was more profit to be made from books than from any other line of business! In other words, learning was valued more highly than gold!

IX

The West African Coast. On the coast the conditions did not permit the growth of huge empires, for the thick forests limited agriculture, population and movement. Nevertheless, there were places where even the serious disadvantages imposed by nature had been partly overcome. Populations had grown large and settled enough to allow big political states to come into existence. The two most important areas of development were the western section of Nigeria and the mouth of the River Congo.

As in the Western Sudan, the small states of Western Nigeria and lower Congo had grown until they controlled other small states on the basis of family relationships.

The Yoruba. In Western Nigeria there was a single culture and language which is called Yoruba. The Yoruba were established at Ile-Ife by about the twelfth century A.D., and shortly afterwards they set up another centre at Oyo. In fact Oyo became more important politically, militarily and economically, but Ile-Ife remained the spiritual and constitutional head of Yorubaland. Yoruba traditions spread eastwards to the Edo of Benin at the mouth of the River Niger and westwards into what is now Dahomey, where the kingdoms of Allada, Whydah and Dahomey were established in the sixth century.

The Yoruba and the Edo of Benin had a very stable political system and a well organised economy, but they were famous above all for their sculpture. They produced sculptures in wood, ivory, terracotta (a red clay) and in metals such as iron, bronze and brass. Today, the finely fashioned heads and wall-plaques of Ife and Benin are the wonder of the museum world. When the first examples were discovered by Europeans in the nineteenth century, they argued that the work was not done by Africans. Perhaps the Greeks or Carthaginians had visited Nigeria a long time ago, they said – or perhaps the sculptures were done by early Portuguese travellers. But slowly the undeniable truth dawned on everyone, and the art treasures of the Yoruba and Edo had to be accepted as examples of African culture.

Africans everywhere (including Haiti and other parts of the West) have shown their tremendous talents in the 'plastic' arts – those which have to do with carving and moulding. The art of Ife and Benin is typical of all Africa in many respects. The really different feature is that it was done in metals, which survive over centuries, while the wood sculpture of other parts of Africa has been the victim of termites, rot, breakages, etc. We know that before the birth of Christ there was a civilisation in Central Nigeria which made terracotta figures similar to those which Ife and Benin were to make in metals from the twelfthth century onwards. There is little doubt that a developed society flourished in that region throughout the centuries after the birth of Christ.

At Nok, the Africans mined and smelted tin. They imported copper from Takedda, a place in the Sahara; and with the copper and tin, they were able to make bronze. They lacked zinc which is required to manufacture brass, but they imported brass all the way from the Middle East, which shows how far the Yoruba were able to extend their trade and culture contacts. Probably, this is why some Yoruba still insist that their ancestors came from the Middle East.

The Yoruba manufactured iron, copper, glass beads, cloth and other everyday items such as pottery. The skilled craftsmen were grouped together in guilds, which is exactly the way that skilled workers were organising themselves in Europe at that time. The guilds in western Nigeria were under the control of the rulers of Ife, Oyo and Benin, but they served the interests not just of the royal family but also of the powerful religious

societies. Even though these cultures were neither Christian nor Muslim, they were religious.

5

African History In The Service of Black Revolution

One of the major dilemmas inherent in the attempt by black people to break through the cultural aspects of white imperialism is that posed by the use of historical knowledge as a weapon in our struggle. We are virtually forced into the invidious position of proving our humanity by citing historical antecedents; and yet the evidence is too often submitted to the white racists for sanction. The white man has already implanted numerous historical myths in the minds of black peoples; and those have to be uprooted, since they can act as a drag on revolutionary action in the present epoch. Under these circumstances, it is necessary to direct our historical activity in the light of two basic principles. Firstly, the effort must be directed solely towards freeing and mobilising black minds. There must be no performances to impress whites, for those whites who find themselves beside us in the firing line will be there for reasons far more profound than their exposure to African history. Secondly, the acquired knowledge of African history must be seen as directly relevant but secondary to the concrete tactics and strategy which are necessary for our liberation. There must be no false distinctions between reflection and action, because the conquest of power is our immediate goal, and the African population at home and abroad is already in combat on a number of fronts.

If there is to be any proving of our humanity it must be by revolutionary means. The Cuban revolution has already demonstrated in this hemisphere the role and achievement of black people as participants in a people's war against imperialism. They were a despised minority in the period of US hegemony, but the dignity which they have achieved in the process of the Cuban revolution is itself eliminating the initial necessity to draw distinction along the lines of race and colour. Interest in the African revolution, in African plastic arts and drama and in the history of Africans in the New World, is cultivated in Cuba today at a level that is far above that of neo-colonialist Jamaica, which is 95 per cent black. In Jamaica, a recent proposal to teach African history and an African language in the schools was turned down by the 'black' prime minister. The conclusion is clear – Jamaican freedom fighters will read some African history in the course of preparing for an engaging in hostilities; but the struggle will not wait until the re-education of the mass of the black people reaches an advanced stage.

In response to the demand for more black culture and history, the national bourgeoisie of the USA has adopted a technique different from that of their neo-colonialist puppets in the West Indies. Having that security which comes from the possession of capital, they feel confident in making certain concessions to black culture in their educational institutions and media of public communications. As always, they concede the lesser demand to maintain the total structure of white capitalist domination, hoping to siphon off young blacks into a preoccupation with African history and culture divorced from the raw reality of the American system as it operates on both the domestic and international front. That gambit must not work. Imagine the juicy contradictions – Rockefeller finances chair on African history from the profits of exploiting South African blacks and upholding apartheid! Black revolutionaries study African culture alongside of researchers into germ warfare against the Vietnamese people!

We blacks in the Americas have missed the opportunity when a more leisurely appraisal of our past might have been possible. It is nearly half a century since Garvey remarked that 'the white world has always tried to rob and discredit us of our history', and in that period far too few blacks made the effort to enrich themselves and brothers by acquiring a knowledge of African history. In 1929, Norman E. Cameron, a black man from Guyana, wrote the first volume of *The Evolution of the Negro*, in which he sought to

revive the pride and confidence of Africans in the New World by pointing to the achievements of African states in the period prior to the European advent; and the work of Richard Moore has been similar in content and purpose. Now the work of self-revaluation in terms of our African past is taking place within a milieu of social upheaval, and the mechanics of upheaval have first priority on the energy of black people.

African civilisations. Only after the above preliminary remarks is it possible to engage in discussion on African history as such. It is the purpose of this paper to suggest that emphasis on the highlights of ancient African civilisations should be complemented by an examination of African culture and history in the same pre-European period. Scholars interested in African history have exhibited a preoccupation with the highly developed political state, which has led to the casual treatment of the smaller states or the so-called ‘stateless societies’, where there is no politico-economic entity wider than the family. This means that the present written history of the continent does not touch on the lives of millions of Africans who lived outside of states such as Egypt, Kush, Ethiopia, Ghana, Benin, etc. Even within those kingdoms the historical accounts often concentrate narrowly on the behaviour of elite groups and dynasties; we need to portray the elements of African everyday life and to comprehend the culture of all Africans, irrespective of whether they were resident in the empire of Mali or in an Ibo village. In reconstructing African civilisations, the concern is to indicate that African social life had meaning and value, and that the African past is one with which the black man in the Americas can identify with pride. With the same criteria in mind, it is worth noting the following aspects of African social behaviour: hospitality, the role and treatment of the aged, law and public order, and social tolerance.

Numerous reports attest to the hospitality of African communities. Within any village or chiefdom, the codes of hospitality and a spirit of charity prevented the extremes of poverty and abandonment which one finds in richer and supposedly more mature societies. The African extended family was in itself an agency for mutual aid and welfare; and the family connections led to the clan, where a similar pattern unfolds. The common ancestor shared by all clan members is a very vague figure on the borders between history and legend, many generations distant, but a clan brother is a brother. He was welcomed, housed and fed if he turned up at the compound of another clan member whom he had never seen before. The

greater the status of the individual, the greater his obligation to have an open house for all, although he did get something in return, for the reciprocal exchange of gifts was a common practice.

Africans approached their earliest European acquaintances in the same hospitable and charitable manner that was normal in dealings among themselves. They called the white men ‘honoured guests’, they gave them protection and love, they plied them with gifts; and it took Africans some time to realise that Europeans worshipped strange gods called Money and Profit. African society did not prove immune to those gods, but, right up to the present, one finds comments on the warmth of African hospitality, emerging from the whole social conscience and not just from unusually well-disposed members of the community.

Because of the extended-family system and the universal hospitality, the aged were fortunately free of the problems of sustenance. They played self-fulfilling and socially satisfying roles within their communities. While old age was a liability in a New World plantation and throughout the capitalist world, in Africa advanced age brought honour, increased respect and authority. The gerontocratic bias of African society meant that a great deal of power and authority was based on seniority in age. An elder was learned and wise because he had had maximum exposure to life in that society, as well as to all of the formal education which was available. As a young man he had spent several months in the ‘bush school’, where he had received instructions prior to initiation; later he had graduated from successive age-groups or through several levels of a fraternity, where secret knowledge was revealed at each stage; and finally an elder would himself be a teacher. In a state system, elders tutored the prospective ruler and advised the ruling king; while in ‘stateless societies’, they were the sole repositories of historical, spiritual and legal knowledge. In both sets of situations they had to be informed and alert because of their responsibilities.

In the great empires of the Western Sudan, Berber and Arab visitors from North Africa never failed to be impressed by the security afforded to goods and persons, even when movement over long distances was involved. The movement of traders along the ‘paths’ in Akan country was equally safe, and these conditions existed in much more humble African societies. The Senegalese Djola, long resident in lineage groups in the Casamance region, were described by Mungo Park as ‘barbarous’, but he found that he could leave his personal possessions among the Djola for months on end

without suffering any losses. This public order was maintained not by an extensive police force, but by the constraint of the community as a whole. Of course, crime did exist in the society, and it was dealt with by a complex code of customary laws, which in recent years have become the subject of scientific enquiry and scholarly treatises. The basic principle of justice was restitution – the object of the legal judgement being to help the wronged party rather than inflict punishment on the offender. It is significant that one hears of nothing resembling a jail within indigenous African society, nor is there any evidence of stocks, fetters and the like. European visitors to West Africa in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were struck by the mildness and humane nature of the laws. Capital punishment, for example, was rare, being completely absent from some societies.

The attitude of the law suggests an attempt to put into practice the concept of tolerance towards human frailty. Tolerance operated in a number of spheres, religion being the most important. Yoruba religion, through Voodoo and Shango, has had a strong impact on the life of Africans in the Caribbean. One scholar who has delved deeply into Yoruba religion has this to say:

> I admire Yoruba paganism first and foremost for its tolerance. It is a religion which provides satisfaction for many different kinds of human temperament. Everyone can worship the divine forces in his own fashion, and there is no rivalry or prejudice between different cults. But there is more than religious tolerance, there is human tolerance. Here the cripples, albinos and other deformed persons have a special god to look after them. They occupy a special position at his shrine, and thus, people who elsewhere are laughed at, are here needed and respected.

African traditional religions are by nature non-imperialistic. Unlike the universal revealed religions, they do not set out to show others light, so that there is no possibility of domination in this sphere. African systems of dynamic belief allowed Islam to exist peacefully for centuries, they allowed the first Christians to enter without demur, and above all the various African religions never waged the religious wars which were so much a part of the history of Europe. Even Christianity in Africa, as represented by the Ethiopian Coptic Church, took on a different and more tolerant aspect. Western Christians mocked the Ethiopian Coptic faith, largely because they despised its syncretisms and its coming to terms with the divergent elements of culture within Ethiopia.

It is to be stressed that while some of the above considerations apply to African society today, they are to be cited in a much-earlier historical context. They were noted by Europeans in the fifteenth century and were obviously in operation long before then. In other words, while the citizens of Songhai, Ife, Kongo and Monomotapa were creating the conditions for living in large territorial states, other Africans were not steeped in darkness.

That, after all, is the great myth which we are still struggling to discard from the minds of our own brothers and sisters here in the Americas. Their fear is that the Africa which they left is one of primordial savagery; they visualise apelike blacks swinging from tree to tree and hear the licking of cannibal chops. To dispel this myth it is invariably necessary to begin by pointing out that Africa, too, had great buildings and great states similar to those which emerged in the history of those countries where our white oppressors and denigrators reside. Both to complement and to transcend that type of instruction, we have also to base ourselves solidly within the culture of Africa.

It is possible to compare the Western Sudan between the fifth and the fifteenth centuries with Europe in the Dark and Middle Ages, and the comparison is advantageous to Africa on many points. But from there it is possible to fall into the trap of believing that the political state is the only meaningful form of social development and to feel bemused as a black man because Europe pursued that form to the full in succeeding centuries, while Africa did not. Quite apart from the fact that stagnation in the ‘Third World’ was causally related to advance in Western Europe, the argument about civilisations leads into a cul-de-sac when we do not reject European cultural egocentricity. In this instance, the whites have merely selected a facet of their own culture which is outstanding – namely, the ability to bring together millions in a single political unit – and they have then used this as a universal yardstick for measuring the inherent worth of cultures and races. (The classic example of this cultural egocentricity is the statement that ‘the black man never invented the wheel’.)

What is most fundamental is an attempt to evaluate the African contribution to the solution of the problems posed by man’s existence in society; and hence the stress placed in this paper on matters pertaining to social relations: codes of hospitality, processes of the law, public order and social and religious tolerance. In each of those areas of human social activity, African norms and practices were given a high value by Europeans

themselves. They often reflected that the hospitality they saw in an African village was lacking in their communities; that the security of goods and persons in Africa stood in marked contrast to brigandage and depredations in Europe; and that the restraint of African law with respect to capital punishment was to be set off against the fact that dozens of offences were still punishable by death in Western Europe up to the sixteenth century. On the other hand, African norms were frustrating to capitalists. For instance the whites resented the polite formulae of African greetings since they were lengthy and could delay business for a whole day. One European denounced African hospitality in the following terms:

> The law of hospitality is obstructive of industry. If there is provision in the country, a man who wants it has only to find out who has got any, and he must have his share. If he enters any man's house during his repast, and gives him the usual salutation, the man must invite him to partake. Thus, whatever abundance a man may get by assiduity, will be shared by the lazy; and thus they seldom calculate for more than necessaries. But the laws of hospitality are not restrained to diet. A common man cannot quietly enjoy a spare shirt or a pair of trousers. Those who are too lazy to plant or hunt are also too lazy to trade.

The above is a beautiful set piece of the moral terminology of capitalist accumulation – the 'assiduous' and the 'industrious' who will inherit the earth, while those who do not share grace are the ones who were 'lazy'. It pointedly illustrates the difference between the African and European cultures. A lot is known about the dialectical development of European society, but very little about that of Africa prior to and immediately after it was drawn into trade relations with Europe and the Americas. However, the few studies which exist suggest that the two continents were fundamentally different in ethos and were not moving in the same direction. Even within the empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai, the explosiveness of class contradictions was lacking, as Diop stresses in his *Nations Negres et Culture*. In the states of Ashanti and Dahomey, whose growth was contemporaneous with European mercantilism, there was no concept of the 'market' in the sense of supply and demand, and the social redistribution of goods made accumulation impossible. The most pronounced line of growth was not economic but cultural. There were a few nuclei representing distinctive ways of organising life, and these were spreading – the Mande, Akan, Yoruba and Hausa being among the best known from West Africa. European commerce (and the slave trade in particular) deflected the course of their historical advance.

The difference between African and European historical formation made the white men ‘superior’ in the operative sense, for they were able to establish hegemony, due to the technology and class dynamic of capitalism. The consequences for Africa were disastrous. Economies were disjointed and oriented externally; anarchy, injustice in the realm of the law, internal slavery and exploitation replaced public security, the human operation of the law and the solidarity of the family. But, apart from the measurable negative effects, one must also consider that a fantastic amount of physical and social energy went into the defensive task of sheer survival. We did survive not only in Africa, but on this side of the Atlantic – the greatest miracle of all time! And every day black people in the Americas perform the miracle anew.

Needless to say, we do more than just survive. Anguished New World blacks, in the search for dignity, usually ask for elements of unquestioned grandeur in their African past. These can be perceived in the Ife/Benin sculptures, the pilgrimage of Mansa Musa, the carved rock churches of Lalibela, and in a great deal more. But, after all that, we would still lack the understanding that ordinary African life had meaning and value. That is one of the weakest aspects of our perception of the African past; and it is that chink which allows the white propaganda machine to suggest that contemporary distortions in African society represent pure atavism. Congolese and Nigerian problems, in particular, have been successfully projected among black people as the breaking out of the ancestral savagery of tribalism, once the restraining hand of white civilisation was removed. Of course, in reality these tragic contemporary situations are consequences of neo-colonial forces impinging on African colonial society, just as colonialism in its mercantilist and imperialist phases had earlier deformed traditional Africa.

The foregoing remarks should be sufficient to substantiate the proposition that an overall view of ancient African civilisations and ancient African cultures is required to expunge the myths about the African past, which linger in the minds of black people everywhere. This is the main revolutionary function of African history in our hemisphere. Some individuals envisage that this knowledge is a stepping-stone to the active regeneration of an African way of life, but this is far-fetched, except in the case of the African continent itself. For instance, President Nyerere, in his policy document *Socialism and Rural Development*, defined a new Socialist

agrarian formation, the *Ujamaa* village, after reflecting on the nature of African traditional society and the direction in which it was already being transformed within the colonial era and the first years of independence. That exercise by the leadership of the people of Tanzania was regional rather than broadly ‘African’, and it was as much an exploration of the present as a recovery of the past. Applied to New World blacks, this means in effect that the history nearest to revolutionary action will be the history of Africans in their new American environments.

6

The Groundings with My Brothers

The government of Jamaica, which is Garvey's homeland, has seen it fit to ban me, a Guyanese, a black man, and an African. But this is not very surprising, because though the composition of that government – of its prime minister, the head of state and several leading personalities – though that composition happens to be predominantly black, as the brothers at home say, they are all white hearted.

These men serve the interests of a foreign, white capitalist system, and at home they uphold a social structure which ensures that the black man resides at the bottom of the social ladder. He is economically oppressed, and culturally he has no opportunity to express himself. That is the situation from which we move.

There has recently, just tonight in fact, come to my attention a statement which is entitled 'Text of Statement' by the Honourable H. L. Shearer, prime minister of Jamaica, made in the House of Representatives on 17 October, regarding the exclusion of Dr Walter Rodney. I, up till now, have not got reasons for the ban imposed on me, and probably I shall make some reference to this document as I go along.

But first, let me indicate this, that the government of Jamaica, in so far as it has attempted to stifle the aspirations of the masses and in so far as it believed that my removal from the scene is going to aid in stifling the masses, is making a serious mistake. This act in itself will not delay their day of judgement. Indeed, these fellows know this, they know the present

state of affairs cannot go on forever; and this is what creates the atmosphere of fear, this is what allows them to take such stupid and panic-stricken measures.

First and foremost for the benefit of some West Indians who still refuse to appreciate that our society is racist, I would like to give a slight historical analysis of the problem. West Indian society is a veritable laboratory of racialism. We virtually invented racialism. Because it was in the slave system on the slave plantation that the fantastic gap between master and slave was translated into a feeling on the part of the white slave master that he had inherently to be superior to that black man who was slaving out in the fields. It was the white plantation owner who produced a number of pseudoscientific and theological theories attesting to the inferiority of the black man. Ours was the society in which modern racialism was engendered, and it has developed and intensified since then, assuming certain subtle but nevertheless vicious forms based on colour, and based on a hierarchy which presupposes that black is the lowest natural colour of things, and that white is at the top. That is the society from which we come, and the particular society has added a new dimension to the bag of tricks which racialists have. That dimension is to try to confuse the people.

It goes like this. They claim that in our society we cannot talk about black and white, because we have these gradations of shades. We have many peoples, we are told. Ninety-five per cent of the Jamaican population is clearly black, the other 5 per cent is divided into these shades, and we are told we have many peoples. It is a harmonious multiracial society, we are told. It is an integrated society, we are told. It reminds me of Ted Jones's poem 'Integrated Nigger'. It is a myth of the ruling class, and it is a subtle myth, an important myth because it does in fact have a certain appeal. It talks about multiracial and harmonious living, which nobody on a theoretical level would oppose. This is what we are struggling for.

The lie is that harmony exists, and the black people show it up to be a lie, sometimes quite spectacularly. This month, October, is Paul Bogle's month, that great black Jamaican patriot who marched and as he marched he said, 'Remember your colour and cleave to the black.' Marcus Garvey was also in the same category. Garvey's appeal was to all black men, whether they were in Jamaica or outside. And even when there were not great leaders present, the mass of the people have constantly been acting against this system. In our epoch the Rastafari have represented the leading

force of this expression of black consciousness. They have rejected this philistine white West Indian society. They have sought their cultural and spiritual roots in Ethiopia and Africa. So that whether there is a big flare-up or not, there is always the constant activity of the black people who perceive that the system has nothing in it for them, except suppression and oppression.

Now the government is terribly afraid of the question of colour. This is something I've learned from living in Jamaica for a period of time. They would much rather you talk about Communism, so that they could tell country people, 'He is a Communist, he wants to take your goats and chickens,' and do those Jamaican peasants want you to take their goats? No man! And they are very right, too, so what government men are afraid of is the question of colour. They are afraid of that tremendous historical experience of the degradation of the black man being brought to the fore. They do not want anybody to challenge their myth about 'Out of many, one people' and a harmonious multiracial society, and they show it in various ways. They will ban people from coming to the country like James Foreman, Stokely Carmichael. They will ban the literature of Malcolm X, Elijah Mohammad, Stokely Carmichael. The black Jamaican government, in case you do not know it, have banned all publications by Stokely Carmichael, publications by Elijah Mohammad, all publications by Malcolm X. I hope Stokely does not go and write a book on cookery or some such thing. It would be banned in Jamaica.

In my own case, to give you a small example, I went to the Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation. I pre-recorded a programme on Black Power and the white power system said that they are not using that programme, when they saw what came out of it. A small example but a token of things to come, no doubt. Because the system does not want you to open the issues, they do not want anybody to articulate those grievances which the masses are talking about all the time.

Now, what is my position? What is the position of all of us because we fall in the category of the black West Indian intellectual, a privilege in our society? What do we do with that privilege? The traditional pattern is that we join the establishment; the black educated man in the West Indies is as much a part of the system of oppression as the bank managers and the plantation overseers.

The system will give you a nice house, a front lawn, a car, a reasonable bank balance. They will say, ‘Sell your black soul.’ That is the condition upon which you exist as a so-called intellectual in the society. How do we break out of this Babylonian captivity? I suggest three ways. I suggest first that the intellectual, the academic, within his own discipline, has to attack those distortions which white imperialism, white cultural imperialism, have produced in all branches of scholarship. In fact what I was attempting to do in the Congress of Black Writers earlier was to talk about that sort of thing and its relationship to African history. Of course, the white press of Canada did not see fit to talk about those points. I think I saw it only in the *McGill Daily*. They were more concerned with nice little juicy bits about violence. We will give them some titbits as we go along.

My second point is that the black intellectual has to move beyond his own discipline to challenge the social myth, which exists in the society as a whole. In other words, this myth about the multiracial society. This is the sort of thing which we have a duty to perform to the black people from whom we came.

Thirdly, *the black intellectual, the black academic, must attach himself to the activity of the black masses*. I shall not deal with point one on this occasion. I shall concentrate on points two and three. I shall try to exemplify my own role in the period while I was there in Jamaica.

I begin by stating, first and foremost, that the struggle was there long before I went and will continue long after I have left. I am simply trying to analyse that particular conjunction of forces as I saw them when I attempted to get in touch with the black people, to perform these two functions: attacking the myth, the various myths rather, and getting in touch, working with the people. On the first level, as far as Black Power was concerned, the response of the population was automatic because this is what they are doing, this is what they are talking about. They can tell you and I about Black Power, but I’ll indicate this later on. You can learn from them what Black Power really means. You do not have to teach them anything. You just have to say it, and they add something to what you are saying.

So the mass response was there, and the government response was also clearly there. They, in their panic, were quick to come out against this new spectre, Black Power. For my own part, I was prepared to make these statements in public, and around me there gathered a nucleus, and a movement was born calling itself the Black Power movement.

Unfortunately I have not brought the aims along with me, but you will find them highly respectable even in the terms of the system. We went outside the university and we talked to black brothers and black sisters, and this the society, this the system could not tolerate. Even more, let us talk about the activities. I lectured at the university, outside of the classroom that is. I had public lectures, I talked about Black Power, and then I left there, I went from the campus. I was prepared to go anywhere that any group of black people were prepared to sit down to talk and listen. Because that is Black Power, that is one of the elements, a sitting-down together to reason, to 'ground' as the brothers say. We have to 'ground together'. There was all this furore about whites being present in the black writers' congress, which most whites did not understand. They do not understand that our historical experience has been speaking to white people, whether it be begging white people, justifying ourselves against white people or even vilifying white people. Our whole context has been, 'That is the man to talk to.'

Now, the new understanding is that black brothers must talk to each other. That is a very simple understanding which any reasonable person outside of a particular 'in-group' would understand. That is why we talk about our 'family discussions'. Now, when I went out, as I said, I would go to the radio if they wanted me, I would speak on television if they allowed me. I spoke at the Extra Mural Centre. Now, these are all highly respectable, and I would go further down into West Kingston, and I would speak wherever there was a possibility of our getting together. It might be in a sports club, it might be in a schoolroom, it might be in a church, it might be in a gully. (Those of you who come from Jamaica know those gully corners.) They are dark, dismal places with a black population who have had to seek refuge there. You will have to go there if you want to talk to them. I have spoken in what people call 'dungle', rubbish dumps, for that is where people live in Jamaica. People live in rubbish dumps. That is where the government puts people to live. Indeed, the government does not even want them to live in rubbish dumps. I do not know where they want them to go, because they bulldoze them off the rubbish dumps and send them God knows where. I have sat on a little oil drum, rusty and in the midst of garbage, and some black brothers and I have grounded together. Now, obviously, this, first of all, must have puzzled the Jamaican government. I must be mad, surely; a man we are giving a job, we are giving status, what is he doing with these guys? Shearer calls them all manner of names there

in this paper, you know: ‘criminals and hooligans’. What is he doing with them? So they are puzzled and then obviously after that suspicious; he must be up to something, as the paper will try to imply. But we spoke, we spoke about a lot of things, and it was just the talking that was important, the meeting of black people. I was trying to contribute something. I was trying to contribute my experience in travelling, in reading, my analysis; and I was also gaining, as I will indicate.

Now, for the government of Jamaica and this statement: I cannot go into it. I have a lot of ambiguous reactions to it. At one level I want to tear it apart, but there are reasons why I do not want to tear it apart. The first is that all the charges made here are either irrelevant, frivolous or vague, and I cannot put forward any defence against such. You know, it is like that trick question: a man comes up and asks you, have you stopped beating your wife? He makes the assumption that you are beating your wife and asks you, have you stopped. So it is that sort of nonsense; they throw out a little thing and then get you to grab the bait; and there is another reason why I would not defend myself against this. People like this man here, the so-called, the Dishonourable H. L. Shearer, prime minister of Jamaica, this traitor to the black race, has no moral authority to lay accusations against me. What I will give instead is not a defence; it is an explanation. It is an attempt to make an analysis of what was going on, in the hope that this has some meaning for other people who are either within the struggle today or would like to join the struggle. For the educated black man, as I said, the principles are clear. There are three possibilities open to him, and it seems to me that if he does not follow every single one of those three, and perhaps some more that he can think of, he is not fulfilling any function as far as our people are concerned, except the function of oppressing them. Let me refer to another statement which I made which the white press found very irritating – that all white people are enemies until proved otherwise, and this applies to black intellectuals, all of us are enemies to the people until we prove otherwise. It is not just a question of student riots.

The students have demonstrated, which is good. They came out; they heard a university lecturer was banned; they got no reason, which is the normal procedure of the Jamaican government (it does not give reasons for things). They came out, they started to walk along the roads, the police started to teargas them, they started to beat them with batons and night sticks and something flared up, relatively small, but it is a great advance I

tell you. There is no more bourgeois campus in the world than the University of the West Indies. Yes, I was there; in my time this would not have happened: they might have demonstrated about bad food in the halls, or in solidarity with South Africans, you know, on quite harmless issues as far as the Jamaican government was concerned. However, they moved, and that in itself is a good thing, but there was more to it than that. The black brothers in Kingston, Jamaica, moved against the government of Jamaica. That is the point that must come home. Let us stop calling it ‘student riots’. What has happened in Jamaica is that the black people of the city of Kingston have seized upon this opportunity to begin their indictment against the government of Jamaica.

Now, let us see what happened. As far as I can gather, fifty buses were overturned and burnt. Fourteen major fires were started in different parts of the city; certain known enemies of the people were spat upon, dragged out of their cars and beaten; shop windows were wrecked. I gather that downtown Kingston looks as if Hurricane Flora has just passed through. Now let us get this abundantly clear – this did not happen as an isolated incident; that is part of a whole social malaise, that is revolutionary activity. It has only marginal significance as far as my ban is concerned. The significance is that the brothers see that I am a spokesman for their cause, and the Jamaica government is so brazen as to stop me from returning. That is the incident that triggered it off, but beneath that, there is a whole range of short-term and long-term considerations which we must take into mind. Take for instance the fact that those fifty buses were burned; that is not just coincidental for those who know Jamaican society. The JOS, which is the private company running transport in Kingston, is one of the most notorious companies in Jamaica. There is a strike there every other day. It is notorious from the point of view of its relationships with the workers, and just recently it decided to hike the fares as far as the people were concerned. Now, imagine the poor people of Jamaica standing in the hot sun, waiting on the bus, having to pay increased fares and while they are struggling to find the 4d, for that is what the fares have gone up to, here is a whole set of guys flashing by in some cars longer than you can see out here in Montreal. You have to go to Jamaica to see long cars, you know. That little middle class there, they love to show off. The bigger the car, the better. A little petty city and they fill it up with American cars, and they jump around, and they feel so pleased with themselves. And the black man is there, and he

has not got 4 Jamaican dollars for a bus fare. So when those fifty buses were burnt, it was that type of issue that was involved. The brothers who were in that struggle, unemployed, they have no housing, they have no education, they have no prospects in the society, save to go to what the brothers call ‘Must Pen’ – May Pen Burial Cemetery. They call it ‘Must Pen’; you must go there.

That is what has been going on in the society. So if we have to take a stand, we have to take a stand perhaps on the first issue, say the immoral, shameless conduct of the Jamaica government in issuing this ban. But it is not the first and presumably will not be the last such action on their part. We also have to take a stand of solidarity behind those black brothers. We also have to recognise that three more martyrs have been added to the long list of black martyrs in Jamaica in recent days. We will have to find out their names. We will have to sing their praises.

This is not an issue which is isolated. In fact, as I speak here, I would like to feel perhaps that what I am saying in one form or another will reach the brothers, and therefore it is a message both to you and to them. And above all, I would like to indicate my own gratification for that experience which I shared with them. Because I learnt. I got knowledge from them, real knowledge. You have to speak to Jamaican Rasta, and you have to listen to him, listen very carefully, and then you will hear him tell you about the Word. And when you listen to him, and you can go back and read *Muntu*, an academic text, and read about *Nomo*, an African concept for Word, and you say, goodness, the Rastas know this, they knew this before Janheinz Jahn. You have to listen to them, and you hear them talk about cosmic power and it rings a bell, I say, but I have read this somewhere, this is Africa. You have to listen to their drums to get the message of the cosmic power.

And when you get that, know you get humility, because look who you are learning from. The system says they have nothing, they are the illiterates, they are the dark people of Jamaica. Our conception of the whole world is that white is good and black is bad, so when you are talking about the man is dark, you mean he is stupid. He has a dark mind. So that is what the system says. But you learn humility after you get into contact with these brothers. And it is really great I am giving here now a personal reaction. I find my colleagues, my so-called peers, white people, black bourgeoisie, all frustrate me and I get annoyed. I find it difficult to conduct a discussion. I

am more likely than not to tell them a few bad words after a while. And by and large, I do not think it is good for the personality, probably makes you contemptuous, haughty and so on, that you have seen and they have not seen. But with the black brothers you learn humility because they are teaching you. And you get confidence, too; you get a confidence that comes from an awareness that our people are beautiful. Beauty is in the very existence of black people.

Now we have gone through a historical experience through which, by all accounts, we should have been wiped out. We have been subjected to genocidal practices. Millions raped from the West African continent, a system of slavery in the West Indies which was designed to kill people. The documents are there. White slave masters used to conduct a discussion. They said, look, we have some blacks, what to do with them? Is it better to let him grow old and work for us for an extended period of time, or should we let him work for a specified period of time, work him so hard and let him die, and buy a fresh slave? And the consensus of opinion was this; take a prime African black, work him to death in five years, and you make a profit. So the system aimed at killing us out!

Now, not only have we survived as a people, but the black brothers in Kingston, Jamaica, in particular, these are brothers who, up to now, are every day performing a miracle. It is a miracle how those fellows live. They live and they are physically fit, they have a vitality of mind, they have a tremendous sense of humour, they have depth. How do they do that in the midst of the existing conditions? And they create; they are always saying things. You know that some of the best painters and writers are coming out of the Rastafari environment. The black people in the West Indies have produced all the culture that we have, whether it be steel band or folk music. Black bourgeoisie and white people in the West Indies have produced nothing! Black people who have suffered all these years create. That is amazing.

So these are things you learn when you are in contact with our people. And, therefore, it seems to me that there is something that we have to give. I tried to outline some of the things which I tried to give.

Commentaries

Living the Groundings – A Personal Context

Patricia Rodney

‘Grounding’ is a practice, a way of living. It is not just a word. It is how Walter lived his life. His personal growth, education and social engagement from childhood shaped his discourse with African and Caribbean peoples who were socially, economically and politically disenfranchised, regardless of their heritage. These experiences culminated in the publication of *The Groundings with My Brothers* in 1969.

Walter Anthony Rodney was born on March 23, 1942, in Georgetown, British Guiana, the second child of a family of five siblings (four brothers and one sister). Walter’s parents, Edward and Pauline Rodney, were primary influences in his formative years, introducing him to activism at an early age. He often accompanied his father, a tailor, and his mother, a seamstress, to local community activities and political meetings. Sociopolitical engagement was not uncommon among Guyanese youth growing up in the 1950s – a time when the recently independent British Guiana had elected the first Socialist government in the Western Hemisphere. Walter and I, along with our peers, were strongly influenced by the political climate and the infectious spirit for independence that called and moved Guyanese of all generations to action.

As a member of the debate team at Queen’s College, Walter further developed his interest in social activism and his ability to effectively communicate his ideas and thoughts. He was the president of the historical

society, lance corporal in the cadet corps, and a high jump champion. In 1960, he won an Open Arts scholarship to enter the University of the West Indies (UWI) at Mona, Jamaica. It was as a student in Jamaica that Walter first felt the disconnect between his life on campus and the grassroots population that surrounded the university. As a student, he enjoyed a well-rounded campus life, debating and participating in student and local politics, attending parties and dances, and excelling at his studies. He graduated with a first-class honours degree in history in 1963.

I first met Walter while we were high school students; it was a causal encounter, and, since we did not socialise in the same circle, we remained mere acquaintances. We met again in December 1960 at a New Year's Eve party in Georgetown; this turned out to be a very meaningful encounter, as it marked the beginning of our long-distance relationship. Walter returned to his studies at UWI, Jamaica, and I moved to London to study nursing. Over the next three years we continued our relationship through correspondence, with Walter making a trip to London in the summer of 1962.

Walter returned to London, this time on an academic scholarship to pursue graduate studies in history at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). In conducting the research for his thesis, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545–1800*, Walter was faced with the dilemma of either relying on existing interpretations of original colonial documents housed in Spain, Portugal and Italy, or otherwise learning two new languages. Already fluent in Spanish, he opted for the latter, developing a working knowledge of Portuguese and Italian in order to fully appreciate the nuances of the languages and to gain a better understanding of the slavery records. Walter spent several months in Portugal, Spain and Italy, steeped in his research and writing. I visited him in Portugal, where I observed him at work researching volumes of colonial records in the archives in Lisbon. Our relationship continued to deepen, and, on his return to London, we committed to spending our lives together. We got married on 2 January 1965.

On 5 July 1966, at the age of twenty-four years, Walter was granted his PhD. This was, however, the second-most significant event of that day: two hours prior he was at the hospital welcoming the arrival of our first child, our son Shaka.

Walter's passion to effect change matured while he was living in London. It was there that he augmented his analytical skills through the study of Marxism with a group of Caribbean students who met weekly, usually on a Friday night, at the home of C. L. R. and Selma James. These sessions would last for hours as they debated the struggles of Caribbean and immigrant workers in London, in Africa and at home in the Caribbean. Walter also became a well-known speaker at Hyde Park, sharpening his oratory skills and his ability to connect with diverse audiences.

Equipped with his PhD, Walter accepted his first academic teaching appointment in 1966 at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. It was an opportunity to immerse himself in the culture of a continent he studied, and whose history and resilience he respected. Walter also spent time writing, mentoring secondary school students and other groups, and conducting classes at the adult education center. I was employed as a public health nurse with the Dar es Salaam City Council. Tanzania was our first 'family home', and it was a magnet for friends and colleagues from Tanzania, other African countries, North America and Europe, with whom we met for food, music, conversation and discussions about the sociopolitical changes in East Africa and throughout the region.

In early 1967, Walter was offered an academic appointment as lecturer in the Department of History at the University of the West Indies at Mona, Jamaica. It was a chance to move back to familiar territory and an opportunity to share with Caribbean students his knowledge of African history and his experiences. With Walter as my guide, I learned firsthand of the extreme socioeconomic disparities in Jamaica. Like many other former colonies, class and skin colour/tone played a significant role in the distribution of wealth and resources – a phenomenon referred to by the late Professor Stuart Hall as 'pigmentocracy'. We spent the weekends exploring the country and socialising with friends. Dominoes, cards and bridge were some of his favourite leisure activities. We had a seemingly ideal life: at the same time that we were the products of working-class families, we were also enjoying academic privileges and social access afforded by his academic position.

Walter, however, was torn by the lack of connection between academia and the working class, and he had a strong desire to bridge these worlds. He was convinced not only that he could impart his knowledge and understanding of history, social construct and political analysis to students

and working-class people, but that he could foster a culture of grassroots change and empower people with tools to implement such change. Walter became well known for his impromptu history lessons and participation in debates around the campus and in the community. He was particularly drawn to (and embraced by) the Rastafarian community who, though disenfranchised by the state apparatus, remained proud of their traditions, and resourceful in their livelihood and production of labour. The Rastafarians were viewed as outcasts and feared because of their beliefs, appearance, and lifestyles, not only by the government but also by the middle class, the church community and even some of the working class.

Walter's conversations with them (and with similarly oppressed or marginalised populations) were based on their self-emancipation and founded on mutual respect and solidarity; one cannot measure the organic and intimately personal connection Walter had and felt with his brethren as he immersed himself in the historical context of their condition. He was profoundly changed by their struggles and considered their survival a daily accomplishment. For him, it was a 'question of action, determined, informed and scientific action against imperialism and its cohorts' – the belief that, as a 'matter of integrity', he must challenge those inequalities as long as he remained in Jamaica. Walter concluded that any inactivity on his part would render him no better than those that created or perpetuated the system. So, the commitment that Walter felt, within the context of his groundings, was rooted in what he believed was a singular purpose, his obligation to effect change.

Walter also believed that there would be a people's uprising in Jamaica at some point in time, as a direct response and consequence of the injustices and unequal distribution of wealth. He could not have predicted, however, that he would be the impetus for one such uprising.

Walter left our home in Kingston in October 1968 to attend the Congress of Black Writers in Montreal. I was pregnant with our second child and was at that time a first-year student in the social sciences, while working part-time as a staff nurse at the UWI hospital. We were surprised that the Shearer government would use this opportunity to deny Walter's reentry into the country. Apparently, the government had initiated this action after the university administration refused to terminate Walter's contract. Although pregnant, I didn't hesitate to join the student-organised demonstration in protest of the government's ban on Walter and of their

declaration of him as ‘persona non grata’. To prevent the students from marching into downtown Kingston, the police dispersed the crowds with teargas and excessive force. The unrest continued for two weeks, spread into the community, broadened to encompass general discontent about conditions in Jamaica, and ultimately resulted in riots in Kingston that forced extensive debates in the Jamaican parliament. It was reported that several working-class people were killed and numerous injured, while millions of dollars in property was destroyed.

As the students returned to the university on 17 October, orders were given to put the Mona campus on lockdown, and non-university personnel were restricted access; this included medical personnel from the university hospital, thus limiting their ability to provide assistance to those in need. The combination of teargas, dehydration and exhaustion from marching brought on premature contractions, and I was immediately placed on bed rest and observation. Since the local situation remained volatile, Shaka and I moved in with our neighbours and stayed there until we finally left Jamaica at the end of October 1968.

Shaka and I reunited with Walter in London. We were looking forward to travelling with him to Cuba, where he could reflect and write about his experiences in Jamaica. However, the process of obtaining visas for Shaka and I took longer than anticipated, and Walter eventually travelled to Havana alone, where he spent many months writing and learning about the experiences of the Cuban people. As my pregnancy progressed, we decided that Shaka and I would travel ahead to Tanzania, where he would join us shortly thereafter. The two of us arrived in Tanzania in early December 1968, and I gave birth to our second child, Kanini, in March 1969. During that time, we stayed with friends until Walter joined us in June of that year. Kanini, whom Walter would see for the first time, was already three months old.

The Groundings with My Brothers is a compilation of speeches on African history that Walter gave on and off campus over the nine-month period we lived in Jamaica. On the journey back to Tanzania, Walter left a number these speeches with friends in London. The publication and sale of the book in 1969 contributed to the establishment of Bogle-L’Ouverture Publications, an independent black publishing house in London.

On his return to academia, Walter was appointed a senior lecturer at the University of Dar es Salaam and focused on teaching, research and other

administrative responsibilities in the department of history. In addition to his work on campus, Walter contributed significantly to *Cheche*, the magazine of the University Students' African Revolutionary Front; conducted lectures in the USARF self-education classes; worked in cooperative villages and student-run farms; attended symposia, demonstrations and exhibitions about the Vietnam War, Portuguese colonial rule and apartheid South Africa; and supported the efforts of the African liberation movements. Walter also continued his research and penned his seminal and now-classic work, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. A devoted father, husband and friend, Walter was at the same time fully immersed in academic discourse and theoretical examination, and entrenched in local politics and activist struggles.

In March 1971, our second daughter, Asha, was born. Although we loved living in Tanzania, the unprecedented political changes occurring in the country were of concern to the Left and other progressive comrades on campus. Walter felt that it was time to return to the Caribbean, where he could more actively participate in efforts to improve the lives of the poor and working class. We also felt the need to be closer to family members – especially our parents, who were getting older – and to raise our children in the Caribbean culture. In 1974, Walter was offered, and accepted, an academic appointment at the University of Guyana.

I left Tanzania in May 1974 for Guyana with our three children, Shaka, Kanini and Asha, while Walter remained in Dar to attend the Sixth Pan African Congress. However, some reactionary governments influenced the host country to permit only government delegates to attend, thus denying Walter the opportunity to participate. Prior to his return to Guyana, Walter spent about six weeks as the co-director of the Summer Research Symposium at the Institute of the Black World (IBW) in Atlanta, Georgia; this was his second visit to the institute, the first being in June 1971. Upon his return to Guyana in September 1974, Walter was informed that the academic appointment he was offered had been revoked by the government. In 1979, on returning to Guyana after completing my undergraduate degree at UWI Jamaica, I, too, became unemployed after I re-applied for my previous position and was informed that I was now overqualified. In a matter of hours, several other job offers were also rescinded. The final question posed to me during an interview for a position at the University of Guyana was about my husband's political activities. My response to the

interviewer was that he was interviewing me and not my husband. I was told that if I did not answer the question that the interview was over. I thanked the panel and left. I was later informed that my file was flagged; I was never to be considered for any university position. In May 1980, a colleague and friend, then director of the Institute of Development Studies, hired me as a research assistant for phase 11 of the Caribbean Technology Policy Studies project. This was only possible because the grant funding that paid my salary was from an international agency.

Because Walter was unemployed in Guyana, to support his family he had no alternative but to seek paid teaching appointments and speaking engagements abroad, in the United States and Europe. Although he was offered numerous academic positions overseas, he was committed to remaining in Guyana. During this period, he conducted research, presented papers at conferences and wrote academic articles for publication. He served as a guest lecturer in various social science courses, as associate editor of *Transition*, the faculty journal, and as history consultant to the University of Guyana. He completed several books, including *Guyanese Sugar Plantations in the Late Nineteenth Century* (1979) and two children's books. His path-breaking work, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881–1905*, and the two children's books, *Kofi Baadu Out of Africa* and *Lakshmi Out of India*, would all be published posthumously. Walter remained actively engaged in politics locally and continued his groundings with bauxite and sugar workers, speaking at 'bottom houses', at public meetings and wherever people could assemble. He conducted weekly educational classes at our home for friends and community members interested in learning about African history and Marxism. Walter joined the Working People's Alliance (WPA), continuing his activism and political engagement as one of its leaders until his assassination, at the age of thirty-eight, on Friday, 13 June 1980.

For Walter, groundings were not isolated events. Rather, groundings exemplified his approach to life: one where academics and activism were integrated and inseparable in the pursuit of equality, justice and a common humanity. His connection to workers and poor people in the Caribbean, Africa, and throughout the world was authentic and organic. The book encapsulated the symbiotic relationship in Jamaica, where Walter was learning from and sharing with the Rastafarian brothers and sisters about their culture, traditions and conditions. Walter often said that he learned

more from the Rastafarian community than he could ever teach them. He would be moved that these conversations, which he so treasured, continue to inspire a new generation.

His absence from our lives is deeply felt. Especially during special occasions and family gatherings, it is a void that seems too deep to fill, and we miss his voice, assurance and analytical mind as we seek solutions to family and contemporary societal issues. His absence is particularly tangible as we celebrate his life annually through the Walter Rodney Symposium, held during the week of his birthdate. The greatest loss is that he was denied the opportunity to know our grandchildren, Asia, Kai, Skye, Appeadua and KwesiAnthony; they will never directly know this loving, witty and playful man that his three children, Shaka, Kanini and Asha, knew and treasured. Our family continues to hold fast to and cherish our wonderful memories of this loving and generous man. He continues to give us the inspiration and hope for a better world. The spirit of Walter lives on!

The Conscious Youth

Robin 'Bongo Jerry' Small

When I met Walter Rodney in January 1968, he looked scarcely older than me. Peter Phillips, who had turned just eighteen the month before, and Mike (Poco) Morgan and myself, both nineteen, had been preparing during the preceding months for Human Rights Year. We knew Government would be cautious about confronting human rights activities, as they themselves had proposed such a year. Hugh Shearer, prime minister in 1968, had been sent as a young envoy in 1962 to the United Nations to make the proposal.

Though still teenagers, we were instrumental in a group called African Youth Move. We established a publishing house and planned support for the liberation struggles in connection with the Organisation of African Unity. Our immediate task was to link the youth of Jamaica in taking the baton from the elders and their tired teammates. Phillips, Morgan, Garth White and others told me of the return of a young alumnus of the University of the West Indies who had gone to greater heights in Africa, in the academy and in the liberation armies. Dashiki-clad and with a heavy head of hair, Walter looked a typical young Jamaican Rastafari of the *combsome* variety – those without dreadlocks. He met my brothers while in England, on his way to the Helsinki World Youth Festival in 1962. By 1963, he was back in London to step over the hurdles leading to a PhD and finer tuning of his teaching skills.

We soon began taking him on our rounds. He was at ease, not susceptible to pressure or bullying. Frequently, in the hard-boiled beat of street activity and stomping grounds, individuals and groups would seek to

impose lifestyles, pecking orders and initiation rites on newcomers. We, the members of African Youth Move, were not into that; but unavoidably many of our associates would flaunt that swagger. Walter, or 'Brother Wally', would just smile and decline a pipe-draw here and there and a spliff everywhere, without being overbearing – gently returning the reasoning (conversation) to a more sober trajectory. The oldest member of our circle was Ras Dizzy, one of the best-known Rastafari poets, a firebrand at times. Among the other senior members were Brother Phonso, who was about the same age as Ras Dizzy, and Single Jack, or 'Tekis', host of the Langston Road gully venue and later a pioneering Ras and revolutionary in Barbados. But most, like Ruddy Tenn, (a footballer, swimmer and technocrat), Frank Hasfal (a printer and writer) and 'Princey' (Audvil King) (a poet and public health inspector), were workers in their twenties – as opposed to younger students like Garth White and Homer Heron, and several others who were in their teens, like John 'Teece' Davis and Daryl Crosskill. We also got to know other youth on campus, like Rupert Lewis, Keith Noel, Arnold Bertran and Claremont Kirton. There were many sisters, too, both inside and outside of African Youth Move. There was Sandra (to be my wife), Sister Minnie, Angela Cunningham, Jackie Vernon, Selena Tapper, and Lucille Edwards. Most of all, there was Pat Rodney, a nurse and the wife of Walter, along with their toddler, Shaka, who was full of energy and amusement. From Trenchtown to Brown's Town, Walter maintained the contacts he made during his student days, between 1960 and 1963, and as we took him through city and island, he would often drop in on people whom he knew before. My home in August Town was one of the meeting places, as was Thunder ('Guns') Yard, also in August Town, and the camp of Lennie and Byron in Hermitage. Sixteen-year-old Orlando Wong (Oku Onuora) was teaching school in Dunkirk when Walter visited that inner-city headquarters, garrison of Ras Negus, Sahle, Daddy Bill and the Dons of Dunkirk. Camperdown School and Wembley Club in East Kingston, where classes climaxed with lectures by Walter Rodney, became regular fixtures. The Sunday activities kicked off with football between the House of Dread and some lesser lights, Bobby 'Righteous' Hamilton included. The newspaper improved once the young historian Rodney joined in editorial efforts. He urged me to publish my verses. I aimed for sound systems and had resisted the 'poetry circle' audience of uptown.

Pat and Walter opened their home to socials, parties and editorial planning. Men and Women from downtown first experienced the lawns and comforts of Kingston's Golden Triangle at their Trafalgar Park home. Various academics got on working terms with counterparts from the School of Hard Knocks, and the University of the Street, through the hospitality of Pat and the instrumentality of Walter. Breakdown of uneasiness between Islanders attended this couple from Guyana, a country on a continent. People like Mervyn Alleyne, the mover behind the African Studies Association of the West Indies (ASAWI), became more effective and was one of the few lecturers who defended and supported the discomfiting activity of this dynamo of a doctor, Rodney. There was resentment against Rodney's activity and association with the street, which manifested in Senior Common Room intrigue on campus and pro-government su-su outside.

Walter made quick trips abroad in the midst of teaching, both on and off campus. We occasionally reminded him that the government would ban him sooner or later, a reality of which he remained conscious. When the Manley Opposition became the government in the Seventies, they let him visit, but they never lifted the ban. As 1968 progressed, the epidemic of strikes, the banning of militant books and music, and police brutality were leading to a crescendo. The news of the young African doctor moving with the Rasta youths was in keeping with this rhythm. My then-girlfriend Sandra was joined by Walter's wife and others in popularising the Afro 'Miriam Makeba' hairstyle. The news of the Montreal Black Writers Conference (coinciding with the Olympics in Mexico City) presented a big opportunity to draw attention to African diaspora networking. Walter and Robert Hill told us about the conference and were local organisers of participation. They visited centres, including my home, collecting the writings of the island. We handed over published pieces and new submissions to *Black Man Speaks*. I included letters to the editor and a poem by Rita Marley, who had decamped from Trenchtown to Nine Miles in St. Ann, farming with Bob, two years after he returned from working in Detroit. Bobby Hill alerted me that my brother Richard, Walter's good friend, would be in Canada as representative of blacks in the UK. One conference proposal, for instance, debated the urgency of a return to the Continent, as opposed to prioritising political consolidation in the Western Hemisphere.

This was even more topical in light of the debate between the Black Panthers' approach and Stokely Carmichael's Pan-Africanist tactics. Stokely had recently bonded with Miriam Makeba. We were conscious that Walter might not return. The authorities were jumpy about reports they were receiving – from August Town, Mona campus, East and West Kingston and other points around the island compass – of this young historian, accustomed to Jamaica, helping various groups to conceptualise how captivity had developed, matured, transformed, and how it financed and mechanised the new economics that many had swallowed under the guise of nationhood and independence.

The brothers left in early October, Heritage Month. But the activities continued, with some students beginning the school year, while others returned to employment and self-employment, meeting in the evenings and nights, travelling the city and island as printed product left press. Because of fear of branding, printing equipment given to the university was neglected by the student guild, and the stock of paper was exposed to the elements. We made use of them, and some of us learned to maintain the machinery and mastered offset lithographic printing. Two brothers, Pepito and Mickey Gonzalez, the elder brothers of the artist Christopher Gonzalez, were our printers.

One Tuesday night in August Town, we were following the Olympics in Mexico City, when Arnold 'Scree' Bertram, the union chairman of the student government, and Rupert Lewis arrived. We were trying to listen to a record of Marcus Garvey's that our brother Eric Clement, 'historian', had received in the mail. It had cracked. Bertram and Lewis brought more disturbing information: Brother Wally had been refused reentry to Jamaica. The news was stunning but not unexpected. We sat for around half an hour mulling over the obvious options, and then we left in cars, bicycles and bikes and joined the crowd of Mona students filing out of their dormitories and study rooms to the undercroft of the university for a mass meeting. Speakers included student leaders like Ralph Gonsalves, president of the student guild, and academics sympathetic to the movement. A protest march was planned for daybreak. What ensued was solidarity between the conscious privileged and the poor, among the young people of the Caribbean.

It was the violation of academic freedom and regional rights which aroused the indignation of the student body and faculty. It was great

education for all and resonated with the frustration of the mass of the people since independence, from the Coral Gardens push against Rastafari to the garrison's terrorisation of the population. The march led to months of protest and rebellion, in many forms. The Olympic Black Power protest of Tommie Smith and John Carlos in Mexico City, following their triumph in the 200 metres, took place on 16 October, the same day as the Rodney protest.

The usefulness of the university and the possibilities unleashed by academic training were impressed upon the needy elements of the population. The Opposition Party was forced to update itself: within four months, their new leader had assumed a black image and heart, adopting Walter's bush jacket style. Rodney's history and record became familiar, celebrated and emulated far and wide – especially his humility in relating to the man and woman in the street. He made a speech at a rally in Montreal in response to the banning by Jamaica's government as against popular reaction. We acquired a recording of the speech, and dozens of copies played at venues and bases around the island. In addition to transformation of the profile of the People's National Party over the next year and a half, other national and international results followed. Upon Walter's advice, a national newspaper was launched. While this paper, named *Abeng*, did not last long, it blew a fanfare and dispersed seed. *Black Man Speaks* continued, and its personnel contributed to the *Abeng* and myriad other efforts, 'Bongo Man' and 'LIJ' included.

Walter Rodney, like other visionaries, was not paralysed by fate, nor by circumstances. Rodney was determined to unravel the contrivance of history and clarify the technicalities of entrapment. In leading by example, he sometimes risked security. He knew that class could be dismantled; and he sensed that race could be consolidated, then transcended. Rodney had this sense from early in life, and being equipped with a sense of time and timetable he achieved much in his record run. Of course, none of this could have been attained without a team: great leaders are always part of a squad.

The Groundings with My Brothers at Fifty

David Austin

I first encountered *The Groundings with My Brothers* as a high school student in the late 1980s, at Third World Books and Crafts in Toronto. I was finding my way in the world, and reading Walter Rodney alongside Malcolm X, Frantz Fanon and C. L. R. James was a crucial part of my political and intellectual development. As a child of Jamaican parents, and as someone who had been attuned to Jamaican politics at an early age, I was struck by Rodney's acute analysis of Jamaican society. But the impact of *The Groundings* on me went even further, influencing my decision to study in Montreal, the city where I had spent part of my childhood. The move was motivated by the discovery that three of *The Groundings*' chapters were based on speeches that Rodney delivered in Montreal during and just after the historic Congress of Black Writers (11–14 October 1968), and I wanted to discover why this city had been such an important site of black radical politics, a phenomenon that I have since explored.[1]

In 1968 Walter Rodney was an academic who, despite his youthful twenty-six years of age, had already established a name for himself in Tanzania, England and Jamaica as a first-class historian. But it was politics that brought Rodney to Montreal, and his participation in the Congress of Black Writers was not only important for the event but also marked a significant turning point in his political life when the coincidence of his

participation in the Congress and his expulsion from Jamaica by the government of Hugh Shearer thrust Rodney onto the international stage.

It is interesting to note here that it was Robert Hill who was better known to members of the Congress organizing committee, and that Rodney was not listed as a speaker in the initial Congress program. According to Raymond Watts, who initiated the Congress of Black Writers, Rodney was added at the eleventh hour, following a phone conversation between Montreal and Jamaica. But the Congress co-chair and future prime minister of Dominica, Rosie Douglas, had anticipated the importance of Rodney's contribution to the event in a *McGill Daily* interview that was published on the eve of the Congress. First describing Hill's relationship with Rastafarians in Jamaica, he then turned to the central role that Hill had played in organizing various events sponsored by the Caribbean Conference Committee in Canada, including a series of conferences in Montreal that had anticipated the Congress of Black Writers.[2] He also described Hill as someone who was now back in Jamaica engaging in an important study of the Garvey movement, and he mentioned a young historian who had travelled from Jamaica with Hill, referring to Rodney as being just 'as committed as Bobby'. Douglas presciently argued that the participation of the duo in the Congress would be vital to the event and that they might in fact be the surprise of the entire conference. He also accurately prophesied that the public would be hearing much more from the two in the months and years to come.[3]

In the lead-up to the Congress, Hill and Rodney had collaborated in the grounding sessions in Jamaica for which he has since become famous, and as I have mentioned, three of the book's chapters are based on presentations that Rodney delivered in Montreal in October 1968. 'Statement of the Jamaica Situation' (co-authored with Robert Hill) and 'African History in the Service of Black Liberation' were delivered during the Congress of Black Writers, and 'The Grounding with My Brothers' was delivered after the Congress.

'Statement of the Jamaica Situation' exposed the myth behind Jamaica's multiracial motto, 'Out of many, one people', and championed the 'epochal march forward of the Black Humanity'. For Rodney the mood and movement of Jamaica's black sufferers was typified in the spirit and example of Rastafari, which rejected all the trappings and symbols of official 'Babylonian' society. But it was also evident in the government's

desperate attempts to maintain the façade of plurality in the face of abject poverty and social inequality that was exemplified in the oppression of Jamaica's sufferers; the ban on Stokely Carmichael, James Forman and H. Rap Brown from entering the country; and the proscription of literature by Carmichael, Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad. State repression was used against the restless black poor majority, including savage attacks by black police officers, who, as Rodney duly noted, employed, in the name of order and security, as much brutality as white officers in the US. But Rasta, and the black consciousness that was in part inspired by US Black Power, meant an interest in 'things African' and black, challenging the epistemological order. Even police brutality pointed the way forward for young blacks who were increasingly 'becoming aware of the possibilities of unleashing armed struggle in their own interests'.

Despite being a late addition, Rodney played a pivotal part in the Congress of Black Writers, making timely interventions on a range of issues as well as introducing the 'big three' participants – James Forman, Harry Edwards, and finally Stokely Carmichael, who was at the peak of his rhetorical and political prowess at the moment and, as the primary exponent of the Black Power movement, was the most anticipated speaker of the entire Congress. And it was Rodney who had the last word at the Congress when he closed the event by inviting delegates to a post-Congress caucus. When it was all over, the participants and, via the media, members of the general public were very familiar with the name Walter Rodney.

In 'African History in the Service of Black Liberation' that Rodney demonstrated the erudite command of history for which he would become renowned. The presentation also gave his audience a glimpse of his capacity to bring history to life by linking the past with the present, making history plain. Rodney also avoided what we might describe as the 'great kings and queens' syndrome, which measured a society's worth based on the existence and power of monarchies, the size of its army, its political structure, its literature, and so forth. Rodney rejected this conception of civilisation – setting him at odds with Richard B. Moore during the Congress – in favour of more egalitarian concepts that reflected the ways in which people related with one another in a given society: the culture of hospitality, the principle of gerontocracy, and the practice of law in Africa.

But having presented his overview of African history to a primarily North American and Caribbean audience, Rodney suggested that apart from

its cathartic value, African history was more relevant to the social development of Africa, and that it was instead the history of blacks in the 'New World' that would better serve as a tool for developing a 'revolutionary strategy' for the Americas.[4] This was perhaps his way of suggesting that as important as it was for us to acquire knowledge of our African past, this was no substitute for being grounded in the more particular experiences and histories that have shaped us in the Americas.

'The Grounding with My Brothers' presentation was delivered following Rodney's expulsion from Jamaica by the government of Hugh Shearer; but, as Rodney argued, it was a mistake for the government to believe that it could somehow halt or stall the movement of Jamaica's black masses against racialised class oppression simply by banning him from the country. Invoking a poem recited by Ted Joans at the Congress, 'Integrated Nigger', or what Joans also called 'The Nice Colored Man', Rodney challenged the myth of a multiracial integrated Jamaican society, and he once again recalled the spirit of Rastafari as the penultimate example of black Jamaica's rejection of the society that had derided, despised and dismissed it.

As Afro-Jamaicans looked towards the African continent, Rodney also called upon black academics and intellectuals to attack the 'distortion of white imperialism, white cultural imperialism', as he had attempted to do in his presentation on African history at the Congress: for intellectuals to move beyond the myth of Jamaica as a multiracial society and to attach themselves to the struggles of the black majority. This is precisely what Rodney himself had done during the grounding sessions in Jamaica, sharing his experience and knowledge of history and society with Jamaica's dispossessed in some of the most economically deprived neighbourhoods in the country. These groundings contributed to the emergence of a black political consciousness in the country and highlighted the importance of blacks speaking to each other without outside interference, another point that he had highlighted during the Congress of Black Writers.

Lastly, Rodney reiterated his respect for Rastafarians and their philosophy, recalling how they had taught him, during his ongoing exchanges with them in Jamaica, humility, among other things. It was the class of sufferers, whose potential was expressed in their artistic creativity, who held the key to the country's future.

Given the events that surrounded Rodney's expulsion from Jamaica, it perhaps makes sense to understand Rodney's presentations in Montreal as part of an extended, interconnected discourse in which each presentation complemented the other. What is clear is that Rodney's presence and presentations in Montreal announced him as an important Pan-African political figure who was beginning to exercise his voice on the world stage. In England, Rodney had been an emerging young historian from Guyana who, having completed his PhD at the School of Oriental and African Studies, was quietly making academic waves with his writing on African history, including two important articles that were published in the *Journal of African History* in 1965 and 1967 – articles that could be understood as in dialogue with the work of Karl Polanyi, on money and the slave trade in West Africa.[5] Like many Caribbean and Pan-African figures before him, he also delivered public talks at Hyde Park, and he was among a number of young West Indians who participated in a study circle in the London home of C. L. R. and Selma James. But it was in Montreal that he came into contact with some of the key figures of the Black Power movement in the United States, with whom he would later collaborate.[6] Moreover, the combination of Rodney's stature among Jamaica's sufferers, his presence at the Congress, and the international attention that his participation in the Congress and his subsequent expulsion from Jamaica received marked the beginning of a trajectory that would eventually lead him back – via Montreal, Havana and Dar es Salaam – to Georgetown, Guyana, his first and final resting place.

If the Congress of Black Writers represented the passing of the torch from the generation of C. L. R. James and Richard B. Moore to that of Carmichael, Hill and Rodney, it was the latter who carried the Caribbean and black radical tradition of the revolutionary intellectual the furthest among his peers. Furthermore, the publication of *The Groundings* did not only mark a new point of departure for Rodney. This small book has since played a big part in grounding and lending direction to countless others – and with its republication, it will continue to do so for generations to come.

Given Walter Rodney's profound understanding of history, he would no doubt appreciate the dialectic at play in terms of the importance of this publication today: on the one hand, the book sheds light on a historical moment in which people thought and fought in order to remake the world; on the other hand, the present political predicament demands that the

remaking of the world assume an even greater sense of urgency. As a revolutionary intellectual, Rodney had a profound appreciation of the relation between popular education and politics, and at a time when political ideas have increasingly become ensconced (and often ossified) in the academy, *The Groundings with My Brothers* reminds us that ideas are, or at least should be, a necessary part of the public political domain, as well, and especially so in times of dread.

The Continued Relevance of Walter Rodney's *Groundings*

Verene A. Shepherd

Walter Rodney's *The Groundings with My Brothers* remains as relevant today as when it was first published. That is because the people of the Caribbean still have not fully embraced the anti-colonial and Pan-Africanist path that he considered vital for societies emerging out of colonialism; therefore, his ideologies need to be popularised and disseminated. Jamaica, for example, appears more like a neo-colonial / pro-colonial state: only 27 per cent of Jamaicans, believe that the country would have been in a worse position if it had remained a British colony, according to a 2017 Bill Johnson poll taken on the eve of the country's fifty-fifth independence anniversary.[7]

But then I remind myself that Pan-Africanists have always been in the minority in the Caribbean; that the regime that expelled Walter Rodney from Jamaica was the regime that brutalised Rastafari in 1963; the regime that was hostile to Pan-Africanism; the regime that Rodney described as 'white-hearted black politicians' who 'serve[d] the interests of a foreign, white capitalist system [while] at home [they] uphold a social structure which ensures that the black man resides at the bottom of their social ladder'; the regime that considered African history potentially subversive.

Today, I scan Jamaican society and ask myself: Are Jamaicans more African centred now than in 1968, when the Hugh Shearer government expelled Rodney? Do we live in a far more egalitarian and just society, one that has incorporated the masses to whom Rodney reached out in 1968? Are our political leaders still 'white hearted blacks' serving the needs of external stakeholders? Have we taken steps to correct the physical and psychological rupture from Africa? Are we still confused about our identity, hiding behind multiracialism and the notion 'out of many one people', while promoting the interests of the minority over that of the majority? Does Jamaica now embrace African history widely? Is Rastafari oppression now a thing of the past? Are activists from the halls of academia as rare as in Rodney's days?

Before reflecting further on those questions, though, let us examine the context for why some support, while others oppose, the ideological orientation Walter Rodney tried to pass on to others with his famous *Groundings. Groundings* is among the influential publications that determined the ideological orientation of some of us in the Caribbean and the Diaspora, taking its place alongside Rodney's own *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*[8] (which explained how the negative consequences of colonialism in Africa sprang mainly from the fact that Africa lost its power); Eric Williams's *Capitalism and Slavery*,[9] CLR James's *The Black Jacobins*,[10] Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*[11] and George Beckford's *Persistent Poverty*.[12] *The Groundings* explained the history of conquest, colonisation and decolonisation; the factors that shaped the ideological foundations of post-colonial society in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean; and the historical basis of the sociopolitical landscape of the 1960s which could not and would not accommodate a Walter Rodney.

The Groundings made some of us public intellectuals. This is manifested in the ways in which more and more academics now mix scholarship with advocacy around issues of human rights and restorative justice. For *Groundings* is more than a booklet that revealed Rodney's intellectualism; *Groundings* is the reclamation of a methodology of *conscientising* developed by Walter Rodney in the 1960s to provide critical social intervention among a population of somewhat-dispossessed but knowledge-hungry urban dwellers. Rodney's aim was to render his

intellectual skills available off campus to those who had no access to the university.

Influenced by this public education strategy, the Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS) partnered with colleagues from the Institute of Caribbean Studies at the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies (UWI) to initiate its own 'Groundings' Project in 2013. They conceived of this project as a way by which the university could, in the twenty-first century, capitalise on its location to provide a co-curricular framework for reasoning and self-development among the student population, with a focus not only on Pan-African issues but also on gender issues.

In particular, there are those in the very UWI history department in which Rodney briefly taught who refuse to imprison themselves within the walls of academia, instead embracing public education as a political mission. Following Rodney and historians who came after him, some of us have shunned the path of the classic intellectual, associated traditionally with the 'ivory tower' and 'snobbishness',[13] and share the views articulated so well by Edward Said that 'the intellectual is an individual in society that confronts orthodoxy and dogma; who cannot be reduced simply to being a faceless professional, a competent member of a class going about his/her business [but] an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion *to*, as well as *for*, a public'; that the intellectual must hold to certain universal standards of truth about human misery and oppression despite his/her national background or class affiliation'; that sometimes the public intellectual must be prepared to be an exile and marginal.[14] As Said puts it, 'The challenge of intellectual life is to be found in dissent against the status quo at a time when the struggle on behalf of the under-represented and disadvantaged groups [still] seems so unfairly weighted against them.'[15]

Rodney would also have been thrilled to know that in 2018, UWI's vice chancellor is someone who was deeply influenced by the content, intention, philosophy and methodology of 'Groundings'. In rolling out the university's new Strategic Plan (2017–22), shaped by the 'Triple-A Vision' – which focuses on *alignment* of industry and academia, expansion of *access* to tertiary education and *agility* to global opportunities – his friend and colleague Vice Chancellor Beckles has essentially rebranded and

repositioned the university intellectually and conceptually, both in the region and across the world.

To return to where I began: despite Rodney's influence on some academics and human rights defenders, more than fifty-five years after independence Jamaica still reflects the legacies of the past. The island still retains the monarchical system of government, and if polls are to be believed, the majority wants this to be so. Republicanism remains a pipe dream, and, despite some small steps towards symbolic decolonisation, too many symbols of colonialism are still on the landscape.

African History is taught at the University of the West Indies, but hardly in the secondary school system. Caribbean history is recognised as a legitimate subject but is not yet mandatory. Maybe policy makers are afraid of the philosophy that history prepares us for activism: that history is a way of ordering knowledge which could become an active part of the consciousness of the uncertified (rather than uneducated) mass of ordinary people, and which could be used by all as an instrument of social change.

However, while some regard history as an irrelevant subject, there is an opposite view, namely, that history has an active cultural and political role because of its relationship to national and regional identity. While the revisionist work of Caribbean historians that would destabilise the myths and stereotypes that prevail about Africa and the Caribbean has not made it into many of the texts used to teach history, at least there is debate over history, truth and objectivity unleashed by postmodernism. There is recognition that many history 'texts' exist in a dialectical relationship with their social and historical context. The following questions are among the ones being posed by the postmodernists: Whose history gets told? In whose name? For what purpose? The obvious public ignorance on issues of African civilisation, slavery, British colonialism and the historical basis of reparation is of grave concern to many.

The current prime minister, the Honourable Andrew Holness, I am happy to say, has offered an apology for the atrocities of Coral Gardens on behalf of the government and is talking about compensation; but present-day Rastafari are confronted with the destruction of Leonard Howell's 'Pinnacle' – what Clinton Hutton refers to as the destruction of the 'intellectual faculty of Rastafari'[16] – and the prospect of losing control of what is shaping up to be a lucrative 'legitimate' herb industry. While the global Rasta, Bob Marley, is venerated, 'ordinary' Rastafarians are still

denigrated, even as ‘brand Jamaica’ relies heavily on the culture and levity of Rastafari. Jamaicans still struggle with their African identity, and bleaching is now a way of coping with pigmentocracy, ‘desmadification’[17] and classism. Ethnic minorities are privileged over the black majority, who have less and less stake in independent Jamaica; there is still no consensus around identity and national consciousness; Garveyism might be taught in schools but his philosophies are not recognisable outside the classroom; I could go on.

Clearly, *The Groundings* is as relevant now as in 1968/9 – even in a country that today celebrates ‘heritage’ and ‘heroes’ during the very week of the anniversary of Rodney’s deportation. Some of those who have been elevated to the rank of national heroes and heroines, and whose life and work we celebrate that week, were black people who bawled out for justice; Black Power activists with an anti-imperial ideology just like Rodney’s.[18] The Caribbean was the site of the formation of European ideas of modernity and their construction of notions of hegemony, and all of us who live in Caribbean space have been deeply offended by the actualisation of such notions of hegemony. Not all feel the need to preach against it constantly; but the growing support for the reparation movement (including repatriation preached by Rastafari) and the recent establishment of the Centre for Reparation Research at the University of the West Indies provide hope that at last the groundwork laid by Rodeny’s *Groundings* is bearing fruit.

Based on the causal link between the crimes of slavery and native genocide, the century of racial apartheid that followed emancipation, and the ongoing harm and injury to the descendants seen everywhere in the Caribbean and its diaspora, Caribbean citizens believe that there is a reparation case to be answered by the relevant European countries whose colonial acts underdeveloped and disfigured the region. The reparation demand is framed within the discourse of development, based on the links between colonialism, development (of Europe) and underdevelopment (of the exploited South). The right to a development agenda is reinforced in the Programme of Activities (POA) for the UN International Decade for People of African Descent and in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA). Clause 158 of the DDPA recognises that ‘historical injustices have undeniably contributed to the poverty, underdevelopment, marginalisation, social exclusion, economic disparities, instability and insecurity that affect many people in different parts of the world, in

particular in developing countries' and recognises 'the need to develop programmes for the social and economic development of these societies and the Diaspora, within the framework of a new partnership based on the spirit of solidarity and mutual respect.'[19]

The DDPA is correct. Poverty is a consequence of colonialism and has always been tied to its discriminatory practices and legacies. The consequence of this is that Caribbean governments that emerged from slavery and colonialism have inherited the massive crisis of community poverty and institutional unpreparedness for development. The pressure of development has driven governments to carry the burden of public employment and social policies designed to confront colonial legacies. As Amartya Sen argued in his 1999 book *Development as Freedom*, overcoming these socioeconomic problems is a central part of the exercise of development and of the process of ensuring that freedom that will otherwise fall at the feet of underdevelopment.[20]

The DDPA and the POA for the decade have suggested solutions. But these solutions are rather vague and nonbinding, and they are framed within the context of what David Martin terms 'lexical colonialism', with insufficient emphasis placed on the recipient and not enough empowerment of the 'recipient' to deal with the 'artefact being transferred'.[21]

The post-independence demand for development with input from former colonial powers still continues, especially as nationalist leaders, anxious to capitalise on the 'prostrate condition of European nations after World War II,'[22] in Bruce Seely's words, never pressed for compensation. On the contrary, the new nations, founded with much hope, faced daunting economic challenges. Seely quotes Ahmad and Wilkie, who note, 'These nations soon began to realize that political freedom could not be construed as an end in itself and that achieving it did not automatically ensure the social and economic well-being of their people.'[23]

Sir Ellis Clarke, who was the Trinidadian government's UN representative to a subcommittee of the Committee on Colonialism in 1964, had made this point in his statement:

> An administering power … is not entitled to extract for centuries all that can be got out of a colony and when that has been done to relieve itself of its obligations by the conferment of a formal but meaningless – meaningless because it cannot possibly be supported – political independence. Justice requires that reparation be made to the country that has suffered the

> ravages of colonialism before that country is expected to face up to the problems and difficulties that will inevitably beset it upon independence.[24]

Europe's alternative strategy of grants and overseas development aid (ODA) is not the answer. Rather, the solution lies in reparatory and decolonial justice. Reparation payments, where allocated appropriately, will likely have economically positive and statistically significant impacts on the region's growth and development.[25]

However, despite requests for engagement with a view to a negotiated settlement and reconciliation, Western European powers have refused to engage in any meaningful dialogue on the issue of reparation. The demand, therefore, remains active, and different reparation activists are pursuing different strategies to press the demand. Regional governments have chosen to build their demand on the development package outlined in a Ten Point Action Plan drafted by the CARICOM (Caribbean Community) Reparations Commission and accepted by all member heads of government.[26] The rationale of the plan is that the Ma'angamizi (African holocaust) and colonialism in the Caribbean severely impaired the region's development options.

The question is whether the majority of people of the Caribbean will rally behind this reparation movement that is gathering speed globally, based on their ideological orientation and resistance to anti-colonialism. Regardless, the late Ambassador Dudley Thompson, that tireless reparation activist, said that activism around reparatory justice will continue because 'the debt has not been paid, the accounts have not been settled.'[27] Reparation is a right to redress and repair, not an act of begging. Perhaps José Martí summed it up best: 'Rights are to be taken, not requested; seized, not begged for.'[28]

Our Responsibilities to Each Other

Randall Robinson

In the fall of 1970, I met Walter Rodney at a reception given by the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, East Africa. By that time, Rodney was well known and highly respected in global circles, and *The Groundings with My Brothers* had been read internationally. Literarily – and more directly – he had taken on an active responsibility in being his brother's keeper.

Human beings have certain physiological needs that must be met in order for them to survive: for water, food, sleep, and so on. Beyond these, however, a sense of general safety and security is key to our emotional and psychological well-being – as are our bonds with family, friends and community. Interwoven with all of this, of course, is also the need to feel that our lives matter – that we have the opportunity to develop and express those gifts that are at the core of each of us.

Recognising the multifaceted threats intrinsic to the challenge of human existence, human beings have long devoted themselves to ensuring that their energy, skills and other resources are invested (i) to insulate themselves from life's varied threats, and (ii) to ensure that their, and their families', needs, as outlined above, are met.

Throughout history, however, there has been another category: those who, while heeding this instinctual impulse to protect self and family, are not merely haunted by the hardships they see in the lives of others, but

faithfully attempt to draw attention to these inequities, to stimulate public concern over these societal failings, and to embark upon their own campaigns of interaction with, and advocacy in support of, marginalised members of their respective societies.

Walter Rodney belonged to this second group.

Reflecting on his attempts to serve as a bridge between the University of the West Indies and the grassroots community that surrounded its Mona campus, indeed, reflecting on his desire to have those who have been blessed by chance and circumstance to be more respectful of those who were not. His widow, Patricia Rodney, writes: 'One cannot measure the organic and intimately personal connection Walter had and felt with his brethren as he immersed himself in the historical context of their condition. He was profoundly changed by their struggles and considered their survival a daily accomplishment.' Of these interactions, Rodney himself wrote: 'They live and they are physically fit, they have a vitality of mind, they have a tremendous sense of humour, they have depth. How do they do that in the midst of the existing conditions?'

Pan-Africanist in thought, word, and deed, and unconfined by the dictates of class-riven societies, Rodney looked beyond the material cues associated with those with whom he interacted, to their essential humanity. In the process, he brought to life the Haitian proverb '*Tout moun se moun*' – every human being is a human being. And without claiming to do so, he made manifest the Ubuntu philosophy underlying so many African cultures: the belief that we discover our true humanity not in lives of isolation, but via our relations with other human beings.

Fervent in his desire to see Africans throughout the diaspora solve the problems – and seize the opportunities – that are uniquely ours, Walter Rodney urged Africans everywhere to acquire new skills – a call that is as important today as it was when issued half a century ago. Indeed, a case can be made that, concomitant with the diaspora-wide quest for expanded academic and technical skills, there should be a renewed appreciation of the humanistic values that underpinned traditional African and Afro-Caribbean societies and allowed them to cohere in the face of quite gruesome and well-documented external assaults.

I had the good fortune to meet Walter Rodney when we were both young men. He was at that time living in Tanzania, and I had moved there, as a recent law school graduate, to compare and contrast the country's

traditional and colonial systems of jurisprudence. He was by that time already well known beyond the boundaries of Africa and the Caribbean as someone who had undertaken considerable research into various aspects of African history, and I was pleased to meet him.

Abraham Maslow, who popularised the notion of man's hierarchy of needs, originally concluded that self-actualisation was the pinnacle of man's achievements. In his later years, however, he modified this stance. He mused that it was not self-actualisation, in a narrow sense, that gives life meaning after all other needs have been met, but rather that human beings only find truer actualisation in giving themselves to some higher outside goal – in altruism or spirituality.

The dominant themes in *The Groundings with My Brothers* are empathy; awareness; respect for self; respect for others; constructive action.

If the theory is valid, as I think it is, that we achieve transcendence through dedication to a purpose beyond ourselves, then Walter Rodney's instinctual belief that 'every human being is a human being', and the research, writings and lectures he undertook as a result, must have bestowed upon him a state of transcendence. In *Groundings*, we see one Caribbean national's committed attempts to rectify societal inequities that were centuries in the making. And in *Groundings*, we are reminded of the importance, throughout the Caribbean, of lifting as we climb.

Notes

Introduction

1. See Carole Boyce Davies, ‘Caribbean GPS: Compasses of Racialization’ in *Caribbean Spaces: Escape Routes from Twilight Zones* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 173–201.
2. Personal communication with Khafra Kambon, chair of the Emancipation Support Committee, Trinidad and Tobago.
3. See the work of the Caribbean Reparations Council for an outlining of their Ten Points Action Plan for reparative justice: caricomreparations.org.
4. Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon, eds, *Not Only the Master’s Tools: African American Studies in Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2005).
5. Walter Rodney, *Walter Rodney Speaks. The Making of an African Intellectual* (Trenton, NJ, Africa World Press, 1990), 112–13.
6. ‘The Groundings with My Sisters: Toward a Black Diasporic Feminist Agenda in the Americas’, *Rewriting Dispersal: Africana Gender Studies* 7:2 (Spring 2009), sfonline.barnard.edu.

2. Black Power, a Basic Understanding

1. See S. Carmichael and C. Hamilton, *Black Power, the Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

3. Black Power – Its Relevance to the West Indies

1. The UWI campus.
2. As the nonblacks in Jamaica.

Commentaries

1. See David Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation: Race, Sex, and Security in Sixties Montreal* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2013).
2. For more on the Caribbean Conference Committee see Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation*, 73–93.
3. 'Black Writers Congress: The Organizers Talk…' *The Review: McGill Daily Supplement*, 11 October 1968, 7.
4. Walter Rodney, 'African History in the Service of Black Revolution,' Congress of Black Writers, 12 October 1968.
5. See Walter Rodney, 'Portuguese Attempts at Monopoly on the Upper Guinea Coast, 1580–1650', *Journal of African History*, 6(3), 1965, 307–22, and Walter Rodney, 'A Reconsideration of the Mane Invasions of Sierra Leone', *Journal of African History*, 8(2), 1967, 219–46. It is in the former article that he alludes to Karl Polanyi's 'Sortings and "Ounce Trade" in the West African Slave Trade', *Journal of African History*, 5(3), 1964, 381–93.
6. Robert Hill, interview by author, Los Angeles, CA, 15–16 May 2003.
7. Syranno Baines, 'Independence Error! – Only 27% of Jamaicans Think the Country Would Be in a Worse Position If It Had Remained a British Colony', *Gleaner*, 6 August 2017.
8. Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1972).
9. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1944).
10. C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, (London: Secker & Warburg, Ltd., 1938).
11. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove, 2007).
12. George L. Beckford, *Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World*, (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 1999).
13. For views on this classic and negative interpretation of the intellectual, see Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 170.
14. Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Vintage Books: 1996), xii–xvi, 11.
15. Ibid., xvii.
16. Personal communication with Clinton Hutton.
17. A frequently used word by the former Vice Chancellor, the late Professor Rex Nettleford, "desmadification" is the process of disrespecting marginalised peoples.
18. I applaud the initiative on the part of Senator Tom Tavares Finson (current minister of culture, gender, entertainment and sports), Hon Olivia Grange and others to get the Lower and Upper Houses to expunge the criminal records of heroes and heroines who were in fact freedom fighters, not criminals.
19. 'World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance', Section IV, Clause 154 (2001). Available at: un.org/WCAR/durban.pdf.
20. Amartya Sen, *Development As Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000).
21. David Martin, *Thoughts on Technology Transfer and Commercialization p. 3, q. 5*, Innovation & Entrepreneurship. Available at: infodev.org/articles/thoughts-technology-transfer-and-commercialization.
22. Bruce Seely, 'Historical Patterns in the Scholarship of Technology Transfer,' *Comparative Technology Transfer and Society* 1 (April 2003), 7–48.
23. A. Ahmad and A. S. Wilkie, 'Technology Transfer in the New International Economic Order: Options, Obstacles, and Dilemmas', In J. McIntyre and D. S. Papp, eds., *The Political Economy*

of International Technology Transfer (New York: Quorum, 1979), 77–94.

24. Quoted in Gordon Lewis, *The Growth of the Modern West Indies* (New York: Monthly Review, 1968), 385.
25. For a recent elaboration upon this perspective, see Stefan Richards, ‘On the Impact of Reparations Payments for Slavery on Growth and Sustainable Development: Can Reparations Buy Growth?’, 24 April 2017.
26. ‘Heads Agree on Reparations Follow-up Action’, CARICOM press release 147: 2013, 6 July 2013.
27. Hilary Beckles, ‘Foreword’, in Anne C. Bailey, *African Voices of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: Beyond the Silence and the Shame* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press 2006), ix.
28. *Inside the Monster*, Elinor Randall, trans., 1975, 27.

Walter Rodney (1942–1980) was a historian, Africanist, professor, author and scholar-activist. Rodney challenged assumptions of Western historians about African history, provided a framework to address the underdevelopment of the African continent and its people, and proposed new standards for analyzing the history of oppressed peoples. Rodney's works provide a platform to discuss contemporary issues and are comprehensive historical resources.

The Walter Rodney Foundation (WRF) is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization that was formed by the Rodney Family to share the life and works of Dr. Walter Rodney with students, scholars, researchers, activists and communities worldwide. The WRF seeks to advance Rodney's contributions to the praxis of scholarship, political activism and consciousness, and social change. Proceeds from this book support the work of The Walter Rodney Foundation.

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KEY ROLES and ACTIVITIES of THE WALTER RODNEY FOUNDATION

Walter Rodney Papers: In 2003, the Walter Rodney Papers were donated by the Rodney family to the Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library (AUC RWWL) in Atlanta, Georgia. The Collection is the largest and most comprehensive collection of writings, speeches, correspondence, photographs and documents created by or about Walter Rodney anywhere in the world and are available for viewing and research. Travel Awards are available. Contact 404.978.2052 or archives@auctr.edu.

Publications: Rodney authored more than ten books and fifty articles, including *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* and *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast*. An up-to-date bibliography of all books, papers, journals and articles written by and about Walter Rodney is maintained. The Foundation also publishes the peer-reviewed journal, *Groundings*: *Development, Pan-Africanism and Critical Theory.*

Walter Rodney Legacy Projects: Ongoing worldwide outreach to collect, record and preserve oral history, information and memories about Dr. Walter Rodney. All materials will become a part of the Walter Rodney Collection at the AUC RWWL.

Walter Rodney Symposium: Since 2004, an annual symposium is held in Atlanta, Georgia, during the week of Walter Rodney's birthday (23 March). The goal is to bring together scholars, researchers, activists, students and the community to discuss contemporary issues from a Rodney perspective and how Rodney's methodology remains relevant today. It is free and open to the public.

Walter Rodney Speaker Series: An annual spring lecture series started in 2013, based on the life and legacy of Dr. Walter Rodney. In collaboration with Atlanta area colleges and universities, undergraduate and graduate students can register for the course component and receive credit towards their degrees. Lectures are free and open to the public.